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Palacio
Valdés

Al James C. Young
recuerdo afectuoso
de su amigo
A. Palacio Valdés

16 Febrero de 1902

It is a charming story and
undoubtedly depicts certain
passages from Valdés's own
experience.

Yours ever,
Nathan Haskell Dole

Jamaica Plain, Dec. 29, 1901.

MAXIMINA

BY

DON ARMANDO PALACIO VALDÉS

AUTHOR OF

"THE MARQUIS OF PEÑALTA"

(*Marta y María*).

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE.

NEW YORK:
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.

MAXIMINA.

I.

MIGUEL reached Pasajes late Friday afternoon. On alighting from the train he found Ursula's boat moored to the shore.

"Good afternoon, Don Miguel," said the boat-woman, showing genuine joy in her face, where the fires of alcohol were flaming more than ever brilliantly; "I was beginning to think that I should not see you again."

"Indeed!"

"How should I know? . . . Men are so queer about getting married! . . . But, señorito, you can't imagine how glad everybody in the village was to hear about it! . . . Only a few jealous women would not believe it. . . . How I will make 'em fume to-night! I'm going all around telling everybody that I myself brought you over to Don Valentín's."

"Don't think of making any one fume," replied the young man, laughing; "but bend to your oars a little more."

"Are you in a hurry to see Maximina?"

"Of course I am."

It was the twilight hour: the shadows clustering in the recesses of the bay had already crept far up on the mountains. On the few vessels at anchor the hands were busy loading and unloading their cargoes, and their shouts and the creaking of windlasses were the only sounds that disturbed the peacefulness of the place.

Directly in front a few lights began to appear in the houses. Miguel did not take his eyes from one that gleamed faintly in the dwelling of the ex-captain of the *Rápido.* He felt a pleasant and delicious desire which from time to time made his lips tremble and his heart beat more rapidly. But no one as yet was in sight on the wooden balcony where so many times he had reclined, watching the arrival and departure of the ships. His eager face betrayed the thoughts that possessed him. Ursula smiled as her sharp eyes watched him covertly.

He leaped on shore, dismissed the boat-woman, mounted the uneven stone stairway, and made his way through the single, crooked street of the village. As he reached the little square, he saw on the balcony of his sweetheart's house a figure which quickly disappeared. The young man smiled with joy, and with a rapid step made his way through the doorway. Without looking in at the tobacconist's shop he rapped on the door with his knuckles.

"Who is it?" cried a sweet, mellow voice within, which echoed in his heart like heavenly music.

"It is Miguel."

The latch was raised; he pushed the door open and saw Maximina herself, with a candle in her hand, on the first landing of the stairway.

She wore a dress of black and white plaid, and her hair was in a braid as usual. She was a little paler than ordinary, and around her soft blue eyes delicate circles were traced, showing the effect of her recent anxieties. She smiled and blushed at sight of Miguel, who in two bounds cleared the distance between them, and clasping her in his arms, imprinted a reasonable score of kisses on her face in spite of the girl's protestations and endeavors to tear herself away.

"I am looking at you!" said a voice from overhead.

It was Doña Rosalía. In spite of the jocose tone in which she spoke, Maximina was so startled that she let the candle fall, and they were left in perfect darkness, until Doña Rosalía, choking with laughter, came with a lamp; but her niece had disappeared.

"Did you ever see a girl like her? She is going to be married to-morrow, and yet she is as bashful as though she had known you only since yesterday. . . . Most likely she has locked herself up in her room. . . . It will make you some trouble to get her out now!"

Miguel went up to her room and called gently at the door.

There was no answer.

"Maximina," he said, with difficulty restraining his laughter.

"I don't want to! I don't want to!" replied the girl, with amusing desperation.

"But what is it that you do not want to do?"

"I don't want to come out!"

"Ah! you don't want to come out? . . . Then see here; the curé is not going to marry us with so much wood separating us! . . ." A few minutes of silence followed. Miguel put his mouth down to the key-hole, and said, lowering his voice: —

"Why won't you open the door, *tonta*[1]? . . . Does it make you feel bashful?"

"Yes," whispered the girl, on the other side.

"Don't be alarmed! Your aunt isn't here."

After some time, and by dint of many persuasive words, she made up her mind to open the door. Even then she was blushing to her ears. Miguel captured her hands, and said, with a gentle reproach in his voice: —

"Come now, little rogue, why didn't you wait for me

[1] Foolish maiden.

on the balcony? . . . Why, I looked for you there until I almost put my eyes out! But not a sign of Maximina!"

"Yes, yes!"

"What does 'yes, yes' mean? Did you wait for me?"

"I have been on the balcony ever since dinner! I saw you get into the boat; I saw you talking and laughing with Ursula; and I saw you jump on shore, and then from the other balcony I saw you when you reached the square. . . ."

"That last I know you did. . . . But we shall see; when are you going to dismount from your high horse? Are you going to treat me this way after we are married?"

"Oh, no!"

They went down into the parlor, where they found Don Valentín, Adolfo, and the girls, who warmly welcomed the young man. The welcome extended him by the ex-captain was not unlike that of an uncommunicative whale; but there was something about him that made it evident that he was satisfied.

Doña Rosalía at that instant came in; and when she saw Maximina, she could not refrain from laughing, whereupon the maiden dashed out of the room with all haste, and flew up the stairs like a hurricane: but Miguel succeeded in overtaking her before she reached her chamber. While he was exhausting all his powers of persuasion to induce her to return with him to the sitting-room, Doña Rosalía, vexed at her running away, called from below: —

"Leave her, Don Miguel; leave that foolish little goose! I don't see how any one can fall in love with her! ough! what a simpleton!"

Of course Maximina, at this new indignity, began to cry; but Miguel was there to comfort her, and no one in the world could do so with greater success.

After a little, the lovers came down again, and quite a

little *tertulia* or reception, composed of neighbors who dropped in to congratulate them, was held in the parlor. Doña Rosalía did not appear for some time. She was unquestionably annoyed with her niece because of her terrible crime of being bashful.

The nucleus of the *tertulia* was formed by a dozen young girls eager to see Miguel's gifts; and he, by refusing to accede to this desire, which he could scarcely understand, gave them an hour of real torture. At last Doña Rosalía called him aside and assured him that it would be the proper thing for him to exhibit them.

The young man was persuaded to do this, and he dragged into the middle of the room his trunk and a grip-sack in which he had brought some jewels. He pulled out the two solitary dresses which he had brought for his bride: the one she was to wear during the ceremony; the other was her travelling-dress. Both aroused great admiration by their softness and elegance; the same with the set of diamonds and pearls. The village maidens could not handle and praise these trinkets enough, and they showed by the extravagance of their exclamations that they regarded the possession of such things as the greatest joy in the world.

Maximina, standing behind, with her eyes wide open, looked on with more astonishment than curiosity; her young friends from time to time cast on her vivacious and questioning glances, to which she answered with a slight and unnatural smile, without losing the frightened expression from her face; this was even increased when she saw lifted out of the trunk her wedding-dress made of white silk trimmed with orange flowers. A deep color spread over her face, and neither the flush nor her trepidation departed from her during the evening.

They spent the time in gayly singing and dancing to

the music of the guitar. Don Valentín — oh, unheard of gallantry! — danced a *zorcio* with a handsome maiden, who, by her persuasive eloquence succeeded in warming up his heels; but he had to give it up suddenly in disgust, owing to an excruciating attack of the gout which paralyzed his right foot. His sweet spouse consoled him by saying: —

"Fine employment that is for you! . . . Simply to show off!"

Miguel danced the *giraldilla*, constantly taking Maximina for his partner. When they became tired, they would go and sit down together in some corner of the room and exchange few words, but numberless glances. The brigadier's son, seeing that his ladylove was suffocating, took a fan and began to fan her; but Maximina, noticing that they were watched and that some smiled, stopped him, gently saying: —

"I don't need to be fanned, thank you very much. You are much more heated than I. . . ."

"Why do you address me so formally?[1] Is that the way we ought to do?"

"Well, then, *thou* art more heated than I. . . . Fan thyself."

At ten o'clock all departed, taking leave of the lovers, with smiles more or less malicious.

"Good night, Maximina; sleep well."—"Your last night of maidenhood, dear! Beware! Your last night!" said one ancient matron, the mother of at least eleven sons.

Maximina smiled, abashed.

"*Adiós! adiós!* . . . How it will pain us to have you leave us!"

And a few of the young maidens kissed her again and again, with great manifestations of love.

[1] She says *Usted está* instead of *tu estás.*

"Girl, don't you forget that this is your last night of maidenhood! Ponder on it! It is a solemn thing!" said the matron once more.

Again Maximina smiled.

Then the old woman frowned, and whispered to the one who was standing next her: —

"That child imagines that she is going on a pilgrimage! *Ay Diós!* It is evident that she has not a grain of feeling. Marriage is a very serious affair . . . very serious." And until she reached her own house she did not cease discoursing long and learnedly on the seriousness of this tie.

Our lovers were left with Doña Rosalía and Don Valentín; the children had already gone to bed, — the youngest, Adolfo, whom his mother had been obliged to take to his room by main force and the promise to wake him on the next day in time to be present at the ceremony. Don Valentín likewise bade them good night and went to his room. Miguel and Maximina sat down on two low chairs, and began to whisper, while Doña Rosalía, still in bad humor, decided to knit until it should seem good to her to put an end to the session, which should be within a very few minutes.

Miguel noticed that Maximina was absent-minded and somewhat nervous.

"What is the matter? . . . I can see by thy face that something troubles thee. . . . Art thou not content to be my wife?"

"Oh, yes! There is nothing the matter."

"Then, why this absent-mindedness?"

She hung her head and did not answer. Miguel insisted upon knowing: —

"Come, tell me, what are you thinking about?"

"I want to ask a favor of you, . . ." she whispered timidly.

"Only one? I would like you to ask me five hundred, and that I might grant them!"

"If I might . . . if you would let me be married in one of my own dresses. . . ."

The young man remained for a moment lost in amazement: then he asked sadly: —

"Don't you wish to be married in the dress that I brought you?"

"It would be very mortifying to me!"

"Besides, it is the fashion to be married in a white dress; especially for maidens like you!"

"Here it is not the fashion. . . . I should be mortified to death!"

Miguel tried to persuade her, but in vain. After exhausting his arguments, which were not very varied, he was anxious to come to a settlement of the difficulty. But Doña Rosalía had noticed something, and lifting her head, she asked:—

"What does this mean? You were not quarrelling, I hope?"

"Nothing, Doña Rosalía; Maximina does not wish to be married in the white dress,—because it would mortify her."

These words instantly put the tobacconist's wife into a storm of fury: —

"And you take any notice of this blockhead's notions? How does she know what she wants, or what she does not want? Did you ever see the like? . . . Such a splendid dress as you have brought her too! . . . It must have cost a fortune! . . . And what does she want done with this dress? . . ."

The brigadier's son, understanding what was passing through his sweetheart's mind, slyly took her hand, and gave it a hearty pressure. Maximina, who was confused and pained, recovered her courage.

"There is no reason to be disturbed, Doña Rosalía, for the matter is not worth it. If Maximina does not wish to be married in white, it is simply because it is not the fashion here. The fault was on my side in having brought the dress without consulting her first. As to what is to be done with it, Maximina has given me an idea; she desires that it be presented to the Virgin of the Church of St. Peter."

The girl, who had said nothing of the sort, pressed his hand to show her gratitude. Doña Rosalía was ambitious of having her niece's dress make a sensation in the village; consequently she still insisted that such a thing should not be done. Nevertheless, Miguel stood firm, taking his maiden's part, and arguing that she was right. Finally Doña Rosalía, unable to hide her indignation, swept out of the room, leaving them alone.

Miguel shrugged his shoulders, and said to the girl, who was greatly disturbed: —

"Don't be worried, dearie. You are in all good rights my wife, and you are under no obligation to obey any one else."

Maximina gave him a tender look of gratitude. And feeling that it was not proper for them to be absolutely alone, she arose, intimating that she wished to go to bed.

It was necessary for them to be up bright and early the next morning. The hour for the ceremony was fixed at half-past five. Miguel also arose, although unwillingly, and his betrothed went to get him a candle from the kitchen. As she was on the point of handing it to him, he said in a jesting tone: —

"Art thou quite sure that we are to be married to-morrow?"

Maximina looked at him with wide-open eyes.

"You had better beware! for there is even now time for me to change my mind. Who knows but what I may make my escape this night, and when morning comes half the people may be absent from the wedding?"

Maximina forced herself to smile. Miguel, who noticed how seriously she took his words, came to her relief, saying: —

"What an innocent little puss you are! Could it be possible that I would throw away my happiness! When a man is lucky enough to find it in this world, he must cling fast hold of it. Within a few hours nothing can separate us. *Adiós* — my *wife!*"

The young man uttered these words as he started up stairs. From the top of the stairway he smiled down on the girl, who had stopped motionless at the parlor door, still evidently a little disturbed by the jest that he had made.

"Till to-morrow! isn't it so?"

Maximina nodded her head.

That night was not one of sleeplessness for Miguel, as the night before a man's marriage, they say, is apt to be. Not a single sad foreboding passed through his mind; no fear, no impetuous eagerness; his determination was so firm and rational, it was so vigorously supported by his intellect and his heart, that there was no room for that unhealthy agitation and dread which attack us at the moment of adopting some weighty resolution. So far as Maximina was concerned, he was sure of being happy. So far as he himself was concerned, he would do his best to be happy. Once and forever dispossessed of the vainglorious desire of "making a brilliant marriage," he was convinced that no woman was better suited to him than this one. Never once did the fever of a hot and violent passion cause him any discomfort. The love that he

felt was intense but calm; neither wholly spiritual, nor wholly material, but a union of both. As soon as he reached his room, he spent a few moments thinking about his betrothed, and then finding himself overpowered by drowsiness, he blew out his light and fell into deep sleep.

Before it was five o'clock, the chamber-maid's voice woke him. It was still pitch dark, and would be so for some time. He lighted the candle, and dressed himself carefully. He was quick about it, though his hands trembled a little. As the solemn moment approached, he could not entirely conquer his nervous and impressionable nature.

When he went down into the parlor, quite an assembly was already gathered; not only those who had been there the evening before, but others besides. All were dressed in their most brilliant attire. Doña Rosalía, who was to be the *madrina*, wore a dress of black merino, and was adorned with a few jewels of small value. Don Valentín, the *padrino*, had pulled out from the bottom of the trunk the dress-coat in which he had been painted when he became a ship's mate; it was a coat of ample circumference, with a narrow collar and very short sleeves: the ex-captain of the *Rápido* wore it with the same grace and dexterity as he did his best shirt. In the starched and crimped bosom shone two large amethysts which he had bought in 1842 in Manilla; over his vest and around his neck hung his watch chain; the watch was gold and had a seal adorned with opals. But it was in his feet that Don Valentín took the greatest pride: his wife had always boasted (because *he* was wholly incapable of boasting about anything) that there were no others in the village so short and well-turned; wherefore, the old sailor, in honor of this solemn occasion, felt called upon to give such a shine to his boots that they equalled "the moons

of Venice"; but solely for the purpose of affording the companion of his life a new and pure delight.

The company missed several damsels, but the report went round that they were engaged in helping dress the bride. It was not long before she made her appearance, in a modest but elegant dark blue woollen dress trimmed with black velvet; she also wore the bridegroom's costly jewels, and a bunch of orange flowers in her bosom.

When she entered the parlor, all the women kissed her, with the exception of her aunt, who, at the sight of the dress she wore, felt the terrible wound that she had received the evening before, open again. Maximina glanced at her timidly three or four times, and went of her own accord to kiss her. But she did not once look in the direction of Miguel, who, on the other hand, devoured her with his eyes, thoroughly understanding the feeling of bashfulness that possessed her in spite of her feigned calmness.

The artistic young girls who had adorned her were far from satisfied with their work. They evidently felt tortured by those keen though insidious doubts that always attack the poet or painter during the last moments of creation. After they were all seated in their places, one would jump up and trip over deftly to set the diamond pin farther back, and another would approach her and give the sprig of orange blossoms "the least bit of a twist"; another would find it necessary slightly to rearrange the hair; and still another would smooth out a wrinkle in the dress, and another adjust it about the neck. In fact, there was a constant coming and going. Maximina allowed them to do as they pleased, and for all their efforts she thanked them with a smile.

"See here, Don Miguel, you have not been to confession yet, have you?" inquired Doña Rosalía.

"No; that is a fact: no one reminded me of it," replied the young man, suddenly rising. "And Maximina?"

"I have already been."

"Then let us be about it, gentlemen!"

As he went out, he again gave Maximina a keen glance, which the girl pretended not to notice.

As yet not even the first gleams of daylight tinged the eastern sky; it is true it had grown cloudy during the night, and the rain was still falling. With umbrella spread, and muffled in their great-coats, Miguel and Don Valentín made their way along the deserted street.

Never had starry and diaphanous night in August seemed more beautiful to our hero: this early morning chill, damp and melancholy, remained graven on his heart as the loveliest of his life. The church offered a still more gloomy and lugubrious spectacle.

They sent word to the curé, and it was not long before he came. He was an elderly gentleman, and, considering the importance of the wedding, answered with resignation the call at such an unusual hour. He led the young man gently by the hand to a dark corner of the temple, and there listened to his confession.

Miguel was still on his knees before the priest when he heard the noise of the wedding procession as it entered the church with considerable tumult, and his heart melted within him, not with sorrow at having offended God, we must confess to his shame, but with sweet and delicious longing.

After granting him absolution, the curé returned to the sacristy to robe himself, and Miguel joined his friends, without being able to catch sight of his bride. Only when the sacristan came to tell them to come to the grand altar, did he see her, accompanied by her aunt. The friends

went forward, pushing their way, and met, without knowing how it was accomplished, at each other's side, near the altar and in front of the curé.

Contrary to all expectations, Maximina appeared quite calm during the ceremony, and replied to the priest's questions in a ringing voice, which pleased the good man so much that he exclaimed: —

"That is the way to answer! That is something like! . . . Not like those prudish girls who are crazy to get married, and yet no one can get a word out of them!"

It was not a pleasant morning to be out, but the parishioners of Saint Peter's were used to such things, and they smiled with satisfaction. The worthy father gave them his blessing, with his hands raised above them solemnly and majestically, imitating, so far as was possible, the attitude of Moses when he separated the waters of the Red Sea.

Then began the mass; the newly wedded couple and the relatives fell upon their knees. When a certain point was reached, Doña Rosalía, who understood exactly how to act, arose and threw a chain around Maximina's head, asking Don Valentín to put the other end over Miguel's shoulder. When they were thus joined together, the son of the brigadier began to move away, gently pulling at the chain. Maximina had not yet given him a glance: she paid no attention to the first pull, supposing it to be accidental; but at the second she whispered, with a smile: —

"Be quiet!"

Miguel pulled still harder.

"For Heaven's sake do take that off!"

When the service was over, those who were present, making quite a congregation, gathered around to offer them their congratulations: there were sly hand-shak-

ings, circumspect pushing, convulsed sounds of laughter: every one was afraid of behaving unseemly in the church.

When they came out, the dawn was just breaking; a few early risers gazed curiously out of their windows to see the procession pass. Miguel had remained behind with a group of men, and once more he lost sight of Maximina, who had gone on ahead with her friends.

In Don Valentín's parlor a table was awaiting them most generously supplied with refreshments and wines, and artistically decorated. Miguel took chocolate with the witnesses; the bride had gone to her room, they said, to change her dress. In a short time he started to do the same. On one of the landing-places of the stairway he came upon his bride, with the maid buttoning her boots: both of them were startled; Maximina kept her eyes fastened on the girl's fingers; Miguel hesitated a moment, and then exclaimed, with the idea of saying something: —

"Ah! you are already dressed, then? I am going to do the same."

And as though some enemy were at his heels, he went up stairs three steps at a time.

They rejoined each other shortly after in the parlor. Maximina's gray travelling-dress and her hat, in the latest style, were very becoming to her. As the hour for their departure was now drawing near, the leave-taking began, accompanied by torrents of tears even more tempestuous than usual. On the part of the feminine sex it was a genuine flood; one young lady went so far as to faint away. Only the bride appeared serene and smiling; a fact which made her aunt unspeakably indignant, and caused her to form a very poor idea of her niece, as was shown by what she confessed afterwards to her friends: —

"What a lack of feeling! If only for the sake of appearances!"

One of Maximina's young mates went to her, bathed in tears, and kissed her.

"Aren't you weeping, Maximina?"

"I can't," replied the poor child.

Nevertheless, when her cousins, the daughters of Doña Rosalía, kissed her on the cheeks, crying, "We don't want you to go away, Maximina!" the deep flush that spread over her face and the peculiar smile that curled her lips were indications, for any one who knew her, that she was not far from turning on the flood-gates of her tears.

All, or almost all, escorted the bridal couple down to the boat in which they were to embark; but only Don Valentín and two other friends, who found room in the row-boat, accompanied them to the station.

It must be remarked that a girl belonging to the village went with the pair to Madrid, in the capacity of lady's maid: her name was Juana, and she was a fresh, strong, and rather attractive-looking damsel. Miguel, knowing his bride's character, had not wished that her maid should be an out and out *Madrileña*.

After they were safely in the station, and the guard's stentorian voice was heard calling the passengers to the train, Don Valentín permitted himself the unwonted luxury of being moved. He embraced his niece tenderly, and kissed her effusively on her hair. Maximina likewise showed more agitation than at any time before; but even then she made an effort to smile.

The engine whistled. The train moved out of the station. They were the only travellers in that compartment, and the young people took seats facing each other at one side: Juana, out of delicacy, sat down at the farthest end.

The husband and wife looked into each other's eyes, and Miguel felt a sweet, gentle thrill of joy, a something unspeakable and heavenly, that caused his heart to beat violently. And after making sure that Juana's attention was called away by the sights from the window, he took his bride's hand and gave it a stealthy kiss, leaning over toward her with his whole body. But the hand — how vexatious! — was gloved. In a moment he hinted to her to take off the glove. Maximina, after letting him implore her by means of expressive pantomime, at last decided, with a laugh, to remove the glove; and the young man imprinted a host of warm kisses on the soft palm, all the while watching the maid out of the corner of his eye.

Then the conversation became general between the three. Juana, who had never been beyond San Sebastian, was astonished at everything she saw, and particularly at the sheep: the hens also seemed to occupy her thoughts deeply. Miguel was assiduous in attentions to his bride. "Maximina, if your hat is in your way, you had better take it off. . . . Let me have it; we will hang it up there — so now it won't fall. . . . See here! you had better take off your heavy boots too. I have your thin shoes here in the hand-bag. . . . I asked your uncle for them. . . . Don't you want to put them on? I am afraid your feet will get cold. . . . Just wait a moment; I will wrap them up in my blanket. . . ."

And, kneeling down, he wrapped up her feet with the greatest care. Joy made them so social that in a little while the husband and wife and the maid were chatting and laughing like jolly companions. Maximina made long circumlocutions, so as not to address her husband directly, because she did not want to call him "you," and at the same time she was too timid to say "thou'

to him. Miguel was aware of her efforts in this direction, but he did not help her any. At last, however, after a long time and much hesitation, in reply to his question, "Shan't we have some breakfast?" she took the fatal leap, and answered timidly, "Just as *thou* pleasest."

Miguel hastily raised his head and affected to be amazed. "Holà, señorita! what familiarity is this? You said 'thou' to me!"

Maximina blushed to her ears, and, hiding her face in her hands, exclaimed: —

"Oh! please don't speak to me so, for I won't do so again."

"What a silly puss!" said the young man, pulling away her hands gently. "That would be amusing."

Juana burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

II.

After they had breakfasted they found that they had no water. At the first stop, Juana got out, and came back with a tumblerful. There is some slight basis for the belief that during her short absence Miguel kissed his bride elsewhere than on her hand; but we have no absolute proof of it.

At Venta de Baños four travellers entered the same compartment, — three ladies and a gentleman. All were upwards of forty. From what they said it was evident that they were brother and sisters; and they spoke with a decided Galician [1] accent.

Miguel took the seat by his wife's side, and put the maid in front of them, and made up his mind to be very circumspect, so that the strangers might not suspect that they

[1] Galicia is the northwestern province of Spain.

were newly married. Nevertheless, one circumstance could not escape them: the constant exchange of glances and the mysterious conversation kept up by the young people betrayed them beyond peradventure. The ladies laughed at first, then they whispered together, and finally they schemed to get into conversation with their companions; and in this they were speedily successful.

It did not take them long to find out what they wanted to know; whereupon there sprang up, for some reason or other, a lively sympathy for Maximina, and they made it perfectly manifest, and overwhelmed her with attentions. The girl, who was not used to such things, appeared confused and embarrassed, and smiled with that timid, bashful look that was characteristic of her.

This entirely won the hearts of the Galician ladies; they openly took her under their protection. They were all unmarried; the brother also. None of them had been willing to get married, "because of the grief which the mere idea of separation caused the others": they were unanimous in this assertion. As for the rest, how many proposals they had refused!

One of them, — Dolores, — according to the other two, had been engaged six years to a law student in Santiago. When he finished his studies, Dolores for some reason or other had broken their engagement, and the young lawyer had gone home, where, in his indignation, he had immediately married the richest belle of the village.

The second sister, Rita, had had several attachments, but her papa had objected to them. The young man who loved her was a poet; he was poor. Nothing could induce her papa to give up his opposition and accept him for a son-in-law. When least they thought of such a thing, he had in desperation disappeared from Santiago, after taking a tender farewell of Rita, — the lady objected to having

the romantic details of this farewell related! — and nothing more was ever heard of him. Some supposed that he had perished in the claws of a tiger while searching for a gold mine in California.

As for the third, Carolina, she was a regular flyaway! Her brother and sisters had never been able to tame her down. When at home they had the greatest reason to think she was in love and that the affair was becoming serious, *poum!* one fine evening she suddenly jilted her lover and took a new one in his place! Carolina, who was forty-five at the very lowest reckoning, became quite rosy when she heard this report, and exclaimed, with a fascinating smile: —

"Don't you heed what they say, Maximina! How silly that girl is! . . . To be sure I cannot deny that I like change; but who does not? Men have to be punished from time to time, for they are very bad! very bad! Don't you be vexed, Señor Rivera. . . . That is the reason why I said to myself, 'I shall not give my heart to any one whatever.'"

"That means," said Rita, "that you have never been really in love!"

"Very likely; as yet I have not been troubled with those anxieties and worriments which lovers, they say, suffer from. No man ever pleased me for more than a fortnight."

"How terrible!" exclaimed Dolores and Rita, laughing.

"Don't say such things, you silly girl!"

"Why shouldn't I say what I feel, Rita?"

"Because it isn't proper. Young ladies ought to be careful what they say!"

"Come now, Carolina," urged Miguel, assuming great seriousness, "in the name of humanity I beg you to soften your hard heart and listen to some happy man!"

"Yes; fine rascals you men are!"

"Child!" cried Dolores.

"Let her alone! let her alone!" interrupted Miguel. "In time she will come to feel how wrong it is! I am in hopes that it will not be long before some one will come and avenge all of us!"

"Nonsense!"

During this banter the brother, who was a fat gentleman, with long white mustaches, snored like a sea-calf.

Maximina listened in amazement to all these things which she could scarcely comprehend, and she glanced at Miguel from time to time, trying to make out whether they were speaking in earnest or in jest. The Señoritas de Cuervo — for such was their name — were on their way to Madrid to spend the season — this was their custom every year: the remainder of the winter they spent at Santiago, and in the spring they went to a very picturesque little village, where they amused themselves in their own way, running like fawns across country, climbing trees to get cherries and figs and apples, drinking water from their hands, making excursions on mule-back to neighboring villages (what fun! what a good time they did have, *madre mia!*), and taking part in farm work, and drinking milk just brought in by the man from the milking.

"This sister Carolina of ours becomes unendurable as soon as we get there. She sets out early in the morning, and no one knows anything about her till dinner time; and before dinner is fairly over, she is off again, and does not get back till night!"

"How you do talk, Lola! I go out with the other girls to hunt for nests or wash clothes down by the river. . . . But you spend your mortal hours exchanging small talk with some silly gallant who dances attendance on you. . . ."

"Heavens! what a cruel thing to say. I must hope, Señor Rivera, that you will not put any credence in such nonsense, without any foundation in fact. . . . Just imagine! all the gallants in that place are farm hands!"

"That makes no difference," replied Miguel. "Farm hands also have hearts and can love beautiful objects. I have no doubt that you have many a suitor among them."

"As to that," replied Lola, with a blush, "if I must tell the truth — yes, sir, they are very fond of me. Every year, as soon as it is known that we have come, the young men make their arrangements to give me a serenade, and they even cut down a little tree so as to get in front of my window."

"The serenade was not for you alone," interrupted Carolina, warmly. . . "It is for all of us."

"But the tree was mine," replied Lola, with some show of ill-temper.

"The tree! very good; but not the serenade," replied the other, somewhat piqued.

Lola gave her a sharp look, and went on: "Judge for yourself, Señor Rivera, whether it does not show that they are in love with me: when the engineers came to build a bridge, I said that I did not like the place where they had made their arrangements to put it, but I wanted it farther back, . . . and as soon as the young men of the village heard what I had said, they made a formal visit to the engineers and told them that the bridge *must* be put where the señorita wanted it, and that no other site for it must be thought of, because they would put a stop to it; and as the engineers were not willing to change their plans, the result was, the bridge was not built till four years ago."

"All this," said Miguel, "is not so much to your honor as to that of those intelligent young men!"

"They are such nice boys!"

"Nothing so sanctifies the soul as love and admiration," exclaimed Rivera, sententiously.

Lola said, "Ah!" and blushed.

These three ladies were dressed in an improbable, and, if we may be allowed the expression, an anachronistic style: their dresses were beautiful, picturesque, and even rather fantastic, such as suited only maidens of fifteen. Carolina wore her hair in two braids with silk ribbons in the ends, and constricted her flabby and wrinkled neck with a blue velvet band from which hung a little emerald crucifix: the others, in their attempt to be a little more fashionable, had their hair done up, but they wore just as many ribbons and other ornaments.

The evening was already at hand.

The Cuervo family proposed to have dinner, and hospitably invited their new-made friends to partake of the luncheon that they had brought with them; Rivera and his bride accepted, and likewise offered to share their provisions, and with all good-fellowship and friendliness they all set to work to make way with them, having first spread napkins over their knees.

The brother, who had waked up just in time, fed like an elephant; during dinner time he made few remarks, but they were to the point: one of them was this: —

"I am a regular eagle as far as tomatoes are concerned!"

Miguel sat in silent wonder for some time, but at last he began to appreciate the depth hidden in this hyperbolical sentence.

A close intimacy had sprung up among them all. Dolores, not satisfied with calling Miguel by his Christian name, instead of his title, proposed that she and Maximina should go to the extent of addressing each other with "thou": —

"I cannot feel that a person is my friend unless I can 'thee and thou' her. . . . Besides, it is customary among girls."

The bride smiled timidly at this strange proposition, and the Galician ladies, without further excuse began to make use of the second personal pronoun. But Maximina, though warmly urged, could not bring herself to such a degree of intimacy, and before she knew it, she dropped into the ordinary form,[1] whereupon the Cuervo ladies showed that they felt affronted; the poor child found herself obliged to make use of numberless roundabout expressions to avoid addressing them directly.

Miguel, in order to take a humorous revenge upon them for the annoyance that they caused his wife, began in turn to speak to them with great familiarity; and, though this for a moment surprised them, they took it in perfectly good part. Not satisfied with this, he soon took occasion to shake the white-mustachioed gentleman rudely by the arm, saying: —

"See here, old boy, don't sleep so much! Wouldn't you like a little gin?"

Don Nazario — for that was his name — opened his eyes in sudden terror, drained the cup that was offered him, and immediately fell into another doze.

It was really time for them all to do the same. So Miguel drew the shade of the lamp, and so "that the light might not trouble their eyes," he also doubled around it a folded newspaper. Thus the car was made dark; only the pale starlight gleamed in through the windows.

It was a clear, cold January night, such as are peculiar to the plains of Castille. Each passenger got into the

[1] Using *Usted,* contraction for *Vuestra merced;* literally, your grace.

most comfortable position possible, snuggling down into the corners. Rivera said to his wife: —

"Lean your head on my shoulder. I cannot sleep in the train."

The girl did as she was bidden, in spite of herself; she was afraid of incommoding him.

All was quiet. Miguel managed to get hold of one of her hands, and gently caressed it. After a while, leaning his head over and touching his lips to his wife's brow, he whispered very softly: —

"Maximina, I adore you," and then he repeated the words with even more emotion, "*Te adóro, te adóro!*"

The girl did not reply; but feigned to be asleep. Miguel asked with persuasive voice: —

"Do you love me? Do you?"

The same immobility.

"Tell me! do you love me?"

Then Maximina, without opening her eyes, made a slight sign of assent, and added: —

"I am very sleepy."

Miguel, perceiving the trembling of her hands, smiled, and said: —

"Then go to sleep, darling."

And now nothing was to be heard in the compartment, except Don Nazario's snoring, in which he was a specialist. He usually began to snore in a deliberate and solemn manner, in decided, full pulsations; gradually it increased in energy, the periods became shorter and more energetic, and at the same time a sort of guttural note was introduced, which was scarcely perceptible at first; from the nostrils the voice descended into the gullet, rising and falling alternately for a long time. But, when least expected, within that apparently invariable rhythm, would be heard a sharp and shrill whistle, like the bugle blast of an

on-coming tempest. And, in fact, the whistle would find an answer in a deep and ominous rumble, and than another still louder, and then another; . . . then the whistling would be repeated in a more terrific fashion, and that would be drowned in a confused murmur of discordant notes fit to inspire the soul with terror. And this conflict of sounds would go on increasing and increasing, until at last, some way or other, it would be suddenly changed into an asthmatic and blatant cough. Then Don Nazario would heave a deep sigh, rest a few short moments, and continue his reverberant oration in measured and dignified tone.

Miguel dozed with his eyes open. His imagination was thronged tumultuously by radiant visions, a thousand foregleams of happiness: life presented itself in sweet and lovely aspect before him, such as it had never hitherto assumed. He had amused himself, he had enjoyed the pleasures of the world; but ever behind them, and sometimes in the midst of them, he perceived the bitter residuum, the wake of weariness and pain which the demon of passion traces across the lives of his worshippers. What a difference now! His heart told him: "Thou hast done well! thou wilt be happy!" And his intellect, weighing carefully and comparing the value of what he had left behind with what he had chosen, likewise gave him its approval.

For a long time he remained awake, feeling the weight of his wife's head resting on his shoulder. From time to time he looked down at her, and though he saw that her eyes were shut, he was inclined to think that she was not asleep.

Finally sleep overcame him. When he opened his eyes, the compartment was already full of the early morning light. He looked at his wife, and saw that she was wide awake.

"Maximina," said he, in a low voice, so as not to disturb the others, "have you been awake long?"

"No; only a little while," said the girl, sitting up.

"And why didn't you sit up?"

"Because I was afraid of disturbing you if I moved."

"But how much I would rather have had you wake me! Don't you know that I have been wanting to talk with you?"

And the young couple began to converse in such low voices that they divined rather than heard each other's words; all the time, the Cuervo sisters, their brother, and Juana were sleeping in various and original positions. What did they talk about? They themselves did not know: words have a conventional value, and all of theirs, without a single exception, expressed the same idea.

Miguel, cautious of speaking about themselves, because he noticed that it embarrassed Maximina, turned the conversation to some pleasing subject and tried to make her laugh, so that her natural bashfulness might wear away. Nevertheless, he took the risk of once asking her, with a keen glance: —

"Are you happy?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you sorry that you are mine?"

"Oh, no! If you only knew! . . ."

"Knew what?"

"Nothing, nothing!"

"Yes; you were going to say something: tell me!"

"It was nonsense."

"Tell me, then! I have the right now to know even the most trifling thing that passes through your mind."

He was obliged to insist long and tenderly before he succeeded in finding out.

"Come now; whisper it in my ear."

And he adroitly led her on. Finally Maximina whispered: —

"I had a very miserable night, Friday."

"Why?"

"After you told me that you still had time to leave me, I could not think of anything else. I imagined that you said it with a peculiar meaning. I kept walking up and down the room all night. *Ay madre mia!* how it made me feel! I was up before any one else in the house, and I tiptoed in my bare feet to your room: then I laid my ear to the key-hole to see if I could hear you breathing; but nothing! What a feeling of dismay I had! When the maid got up, I asked her with a real sense of dread if you had been called. She told me 'Yes,' and I drew a long breath. But still I was not entirely myself: I was afraid that when the curé asked if you loved me, you would say 'No.' When I heard you say 'Yes,' my heart gave a bound of joy, and I said to myself, 'Now you are mine!'"

"And indeed I am!" exclaimed the young man, kissing her forehead.

The train was now rolling along across the plains near Madrid. The Señoritas de Cuervo awoke; the daylight was not very flattering to their natural beauties, but a series of delicate manipulations which gave convincing proof of their artistic aptitude, quickly worked a change. From a great Russia-leather dressing-case they took out combs, brushes, pomade, hairpins, rice powder, and a rouge pot, and amid a thousand affectionate words and infantile caresses, they proceeded to arrange and retouch each other's toilettes with the most scrupulous care.

"Come, child, stand still! . . . If you aren't careful, I shall pinch you. . . . Mercy, what a naughty girl you are!"

"I am nervous, Lola, I am nervous!"

"Everybody knows that you are going to see *somebody* very soon, and I am not going to tell."

"What a goose you are! Rivera will be sure to believe you!"

Maximina, with her eyes opened wide, looked in amazement at this improvised toilette. The De Cuervos begged her to follow their example, and then she suddenly awoke from her stupor, and thanked them with embarrassment.

Our travellers found *la brigadiera* Angela[1] and Julia waiting for them at the station. The latter hugged and kissed her sister-in-law again and again; the former offered her hand, and also kissed her on the forehead.

After taking leave of their travelling acquaintances, with a thousand friendly promises, they entered the carriage which *la brigadiera* had brought. Julia insisted that her mother and the bride should occupy the back seat; she herself could not take her eyes from her new sister, and she held her hands, pressing them affectionately all the time. Maximina endeavored to conquer her timidity and appear affectionate, and by a mighty effort she succeded.

Miguel's step-mother showed herself affable and courteous, but still it was impossible for her to get entirely rid of that proud and scornful mien that was always peculiar to her. The bride from time to time cast fleeting and timid glances at her.

On reaching the house, Julia ran ahead to show the way to the suite of rooms that were put at their disposal; she herself had arranged them with the greatest care. Not a single detail was lacking: never had forethought been more successful in providing all the necessities of a woman's life, from flowers and sewing-case to glove-buttoner and hairpins. Unfortunately Maximina could not

[1] Brigadier-General Rivera's widow, Miguel's step-mother.

appreciate these refinements of elegance and good taste: everything was for her equally new and lovely.

Miguel met his sister in the corridor.

"Where is Maximina?"

"I left her in her room, taking off her wraps. She is waiting for her maid to bring her shoes."

"Then I'm going to take off my things too, and brush my hair a little," said the young man, rather awkwardly.

Julia stifled a laugh, and ran away.

When Miguel reached his room, he took off his overcoat, and going to his wife, who was still in her gray travelling-suit, he pressed her to his heart, and kissed her again and again. Then taking her hand and drawing her to a chair, he seated her on his knees, and began to kiss her passion ately.

Maximina grew as red as a cherry, and though she was conscious that all this sort of thing was eminently proper, she managed gently to escape from his arms. Miguel, who himself felt rather confused, allowed her to get up and leave the room: he followed her shortly after.

It was Sunday, and they had to go to mass. As *la brigadiera* and Julia had already been, Maximina, Miguel, and Juana were the only ones to go, and they chose San Ginez. The maid, who would not have considered it as going to church at all if she did not have a full view of the priest from head to foot, made her way through the crowd and took her place near the altar. The young couple stationed themselves a little farther back. Never before had the incruental sacrifice seemed so beautiful to Miguel, and never had he taken so much joy in it, although his imagination did not wing its flight exactly in the direction of Golgotha, nor were his eyes always turned toward the officiating clergyman. Heaven, which is ever

very merciful to the newly wedded, has ere this forgiven him these shortcomings.

After breakfast Miguel proposed a walk through the *Retiro*[1]; the afternoon, though cold, was calm and clear. *La brigadiera* did not care to accompany them, but what delight Julita took in helping her sister-in-law dress, and in giving the last touches to her toilette! She selected the dress for her to wear, and helped her put it on; she arranged her hair according to the fashion, fastened on her jewelry, and the flowers in her bosom, and even brushed her boots. She was rosy with delight in performing these offices. As soon as they reached the street, she walked along by her side, intoxicated with pride, in a sweetly patronizing way, as though saying: "Just behold this young creature, even younger than I am! And yet she is a married lady! Treat her with great respect!"

Before reaching the Park, Miguel, accidentally looking back, saw in the dim distance of the Calle de Alcalá, diminished by the density of the ambient air, the delicate profile of Utrilla, that famous cadet of yore, and he said calmly to his wife: —

"Now, Maximina, though we seem to be mere private citizens going out for a walk to sun ourselves in the *Retiro*, still we have a military escort."

Julita blushed.

"An escort? I see no one," exclaimed Maximina, turning her head.

"It is not so easy; but by and by I will give you the glass, and see if you will be able to make him out."

Julita pressed her hand, and whispered: —

"Don't mind what this foolish fellow says."

[1] *El buen Retiro*, a public park and drive in Madrid, formerly the pleasure ground of the Spanish kings.

They were by this time in the Park, and Utrilla's profile was growing more and more distinct in the clear and delicious atmosphere slightly warmed by the sun.

Maximina walked along, and gazed with a mixture of surprise and awe at the throng of gentlemen and ladies passing her, and impudently staring at her face and dress with that haughty, inquisitorial look which the Madrileños are accustomed to assume as they pass each other. And she even imagined that she heard remarks made about her behind her back: —

"That is a costly dress, yes, indeed! but that child does not have any style about wearing it! She looks like a little saint from the country."

This did not offend her, because she was perfectly convinced of her insignificance by the side of such a *gran señor* and *señora;* but it made her a little homesick not to see a single friendly face, and she half clung to her husband's side as if to seek shelter from the vague and unfair hostility which she saw around her.

But as she glanced at him she saw that he too was walking along with a haughty frown, and that his face showed the same scornful indifference and the same bored expression with all the others. And her heart all the more sank within her, because she was not as yet aware that the sentiment in vogue in Madrid is hate, and that even if it is not felt, it is the thing to pretend to show it, at least in public.

But it was not to be expected that our heroine should as yet have become versed in all these refinements of modern civilization.

After they had walked around the Park several times, Miguel said to his sister: —

"See here, Julita, why hasn't Utrilla joined us, now that mamma isn't with us?"

"Because I do not wish it," replied Julita, quick as a flash and with great decision.

"And why don't you wish it?"

"Because I don't!"

Miguel looked at her a moment, with a quizzical expression, and said: —

"Well, then, just as you please."

During their walk Utrilla, with incredible geometrical skill, cut a series of circles, ellipses, parabolas, and other incomprehensible and erratic curves, the focus of which was constantly our friends. When they went home, he took a straight line, so well reckoning the measure of his powers that the outline of his silhouette all the way just came short of being blotted out on the edge of the horizon.

Before going into the house they went to the Swiss restaurant[1] to drink chocolate. While they were there, Rivera saw for a single instant the cadet's face pressed against the window-pane.

"Julita, won't you let me go out and ask that boy to take chocolate with us?"

"I don't wish you to! I don't wish you to!" exclaimed the young lady, in an almost frantic tone.

There was nothing left for it but to let her have her own way and torture the unhappy son of Mars.

"Maximina, I suppose that you don't know," said the cruel little Madrileña, as they were going into the house, "what we call such lads as the one who followed us to the door!"

"No; what?"

"*Encerradores*."[2]

And laughing, she ran up stairs.

Dinner passed in social and friendly converse. *La bri-*

[1] *El reservado del Suizo.*

[2] Lady-killers, literally, drivers of cattle.

gadiera was beaming that day, as Miguel used to say; she talked a great deal for her, and went so far as to relate in her pleasant Seville accent a number of anecdotes about people of note in Madrid.

But when they came to dessert, Maximina began to feel somewhat uneasy, because it had been agreed among them all that they should stay at home that evening, and go to bed betimes, for they were all tired, especially *la brigadiera* and Julita, who had arisen so early that morning.

The problem of getting up from the table and retiring appeared terribly formidable to the young girl of Pasajes.

Fortunately, *la brigadiera* and Julita were both in good humor; dessert was taken leisurely, and no one beside herself noticed it. As the moments passed, her embarrassment increased, and she felt a strange trembling come over her, preventing her, in spite of herself, from taking part in the conversation. And, indeed, just as she feared, the moment came when the conversation began to languish. Miguel, in order to hide the small modicum of embarrassment which he also felt, did his best to set it going again, and his success was remarkable for a quarter of an hour.

But the end inevitably came at last. *La brigadiera* yawned two or three times; Julita looked at the clock, and saw that it was half-past nine. Maximina fixed her eyes on the table-cloth and played with her napkin-ring, while her husband, overcome by a decided feeling of awkwardness, made his chair squeak.

At last Julita jumped up suddenly, hurried from the dining-room, and immediately returned with a small candlestick in her hand, quickly went to her sister-in-law and kissed her cheek, saying, "Good night."[1] And she

[1] *Hasta mañana*, literally, till morning.

ran out of the room again, with a smile on her lips to hide the embarrassment which she felt in common with the others.

"Well, young people," said *la brigadiera* arising with emphasis, "let us retire; we all feel the need of rest. . . . Isabel, make a light in the guest chamber."

Maximina, blushing to her ears, and scarcely able to move, owing to her timidity, went to kiss her. Miguel did the same; and though he felt a genuine sense of awkwardness, he cloaked it under the smile of a man of the world.

III.

MIGUEL, though he had as yet said nothing about it, had made up his mind to live in a separate house, though it should be near his step-mother's. When Julita learned this decision, she felt deeply grieved, and could not help being indignant with her brother. It was not long, though, before she came to see that he was right.

La brigadiera treated Maximina with all the kindness of which she was capable; Julita overwhelmed her with attentions and caresses, but, nevertheless, it was impossible to overcome her diffidence. She did not dare ask for anything which she wanted, and so time and again she went without it. At table, when she wished to be helped to anything, the most that she would do would be to give Miguel a covert hint to have it passed. She never thought of giving any orders to the house-servants; only her maid Juana she ventured to call to her aid in the various requirements of her position.

Miguel began to feel a little annoyed about it, because he could not help imagining that his wife, in spite of her happy face, was not very well contented where she

was, and he had even gently chided her for her lack of confidence.

One day not long after their arrival, as he was coming in from out of doors, and was just about going to his rooms, Juana called him aside, with an air of great mystery, and said: —

"Señorito, I want to tell you something that you ought to know. . . . La señorita has been used to have a lunch when she was at home. . . . And here she does not like to ask for it. . . . To-day she sent me out to buy a few biscuits. . . . See, I have them here."

"Why, my poor little girl!" exclaimed Miguel, in real grief. "But how foolish of her!"

"Don't for Heaven's sake let her know that I told you, for then she would not trust me any longer."

"How careless I have been."

And he went to his wife's room, saying: —

"Maximina, I have come in hungry as a bear: I can't wait till dinner time. Please run down to the dining-room and tell them to bring me up some lunch."

"What would you like?"

"Anything — whatever you had for your lunch."

The young girl was embarrassed.

"The fact is . . . I . . . I have not had any lunch to-day."

"Why not?" exclaimed Miguel, with a great show of surprise. "Why, here it is almost six o'clock. . . . Didn't they bring you anything? See here, Juana, Juana" (calling in a loud voice), "call Señorita Julia. . . ."

"What are you going to do? for Heaven's sake what are you going to do?" cried the girl, full of terror.

"Nothing; merely to find out why they have not brought you any sweetmeats, or a piece of pie, or whatever you take. . . ."

"But I did not ask for anything!"

"That makes no difference; it is their business always to bring you whatever you are used to having."

"What did you want, Miguel?" asked Julia, coming in.

"I wanted to ask why it was that Maximina hasn't been served with lunch, and here it is almost six o'clock."

Julia, in her turn, was confused.

"Why, it was because . . . because Maximina doesn't take lunch."

"What do you mean . . . doesn't take lunch?" exclaimed Miguel, in astonishment.

"I asked her about it the very first day, and she told me that she was not in the habit of taking lunch."

Miguel gazed at Maximina, who blushed as though she had been detected in some heinous crime.

"Then I will tell you that she does," he said, raising his voice and turning upon Julia with stern countenance. "I tell you that she always is accustomed to have one, and you have done very wrong, knowing her disposition, not to insist upon it, or at least not to have asked me about it."

"For Heaven's sake, Miguel!" murmured Maximina, in a tone of real anguish.

Julia flushed deeply, and turning on her heels, hastened from the room. Maximina remained like one petrified.

Her husband, with a frowning face, strode up and down the room several times, and then followed his sister and went straight to the dining-room, where he found her very melancholy, taking out some plates. Giving her a caress, and bursting into a laugh, he said: —

"I knew well that Maximina did not ask for lunch. Don't mind what I said to you. I put her in this painful position to see if I could not cure her of her bashfulness."

"Then you had better be careful! your gun went off at

the wrong end, for it was I whom you hit!" answered the young girl, really vexed. "And so you are trying to make it up by flattery!"

"Hello! We aren't jealous, are we?"

"You would like to have me be, you silly fellow."

"Well, I confess that I should," said Miguel, taking her in his arms and giving her a little bite on the neck. "It seems to me that jealousy has made its appearance."

"Stop! stop it! you goose!" she replied, trying to escape from him. "Can't you behave, Miguel? Let me alone, Miguel!"

And after a violent struggle she tore herself away from her brother's arms, and ran angrily from the room, while her brother stayed behind, laughing.

In the days that followed it became evident that Maximina had won the good graces of every one in the house. Nor could it have been otherwise, considering her sweet, sensible, and modest nature. Nevertheless, Miguel could not help feeling somewhat annoyed that advantage should be taken of this, and that her wishes were not in the least consulted, but that the programme for the day — walks and drives, theatres, shopping and calls — should be laid out without even asking her if she would not prefer to stay at home.

This largely hastened his departure, and he selected a very large and handsome flat in the neighborhood. It was rather beyond his means, but he counted on making up the extra amount by cutting off superfluities.

Our hero found great amusement in going with his wife to purchase the furniture that was needed. The edge of his enjoyment, however, was dulled by the fact that *la brigadiera* and Julia were very apt to join them, and then of course their right of choice was abrogated, and even the expression of opinion was denied them. Miguel was

not a little disturbed by this, and therefore, whenever it was possible, avoided having his step-mother accompany them; but to his surprise, Maximina did not even then show herself any better satisfied nor disposed to give her views.

It seemed as though she were indifferent to everything, and were unfavorably impressed by a luxury to which she had never been accustomed. From time to time she ventured timidly to say that such and such a wardrobe or sofa was pretty, but "very expensive!"

Miguel several times felt impatient at her indifference, but quick repentance seized him when he saw how much it affected her if he spoke curtly to his wife, and he merely rallied her on her economical tendencies.

What pleased Maximina most in these excursions was to walk with her husband alone through the streets; but still, in spite of all his entreaties, she could not bring herself to take his arm in the daytime.

"It would make me feel embarrassed; everybody is looking at us."

"What they are surprised at is, that I ever fell in love with such an ugly piece of humanity!"

Maximina lifted her big eyes to him with a timid smile, and looked her gratitude.

"I am surprised myself . . . when I see so many pretty women all around; I can't imagine how you happened to choose me. . . ."

"Because I am famous for my bad taste."

"That must be it."

Miguel with real feeling secretly gave her hand a hearty squeeze.

When it was evening, the case was very different. Then she consented to lean on his arm, and did not try to hide the immense pleasure that it gave her. But if they came

into the glare of a shop window, she would find some excuse to withdraw her arm.

One night when they went out, Miguel, either through thoughtlessness or as a joke, did not offer her his arm. After a while Maximina, as though adopting an energetic resolution after long hesitation, suddenly took his arm. Miguel looked at her and smiled: —

"*Holá!* who taught you to take what belonged to you?"

The girl hung her head and blushed, but she did not let go.

La brigadiera found her step-son's wife very much to her mind, although she felt sorry that he had stooped so low; thus she expressed herself to Julia and her friends: she said nothing to Miguel, but she did not leave him in doubt as to her favorable opinion.

Nevertheless, he did not become any easier in mind, because he perceived that his step-mother was beginning to exercise over his young wife the same absolute and tyrannical power as over Julia, only, if anything, more openly, owing to the more gentle and timid nature of the former. Nor could he deny that affection in such people as *la brigadiera* is always in direct proportion to the degree of submission shown by those with whom they come into relationship.

One afternoon when Julia had just left their room, Maximina exclaimed in an outburst of enthusiasm: —

"How I do like your sister!"

Miguel gave her a keen glance: —

"And mamma?"

". . . I like her too," replied the young wife.

He asked her no more questions, but that very day the son of the brigadier told the landlord that he should not be able to take the third floor of that house, and chose

another in the Plaza de Santa Ana. The excuse that he gave his family for this change was, that he could not live so far away from the office of his paper, now that he was going to take a more active part in the editing of it.

And in truth he did not regret it; it was not long before he became convinced of the wisdom of his decision, and congratulated himself upon it. It happened that one day after he had been superintending the arrangement of his new quarters, he met Maximina, and saw that her eyes were red as though she had been weeping. His heart told him that something had gone wrong, and he inquired with solicitude: —

"What is the matter? You have been crying!"

"No," replied the girl, with a smile. "I have just been washing my face."

"Yes; you washed your face, but you had been crying. Tell me! tell me quick, what was it?"

"Nothing."

"Very well, then," replied the young man, with determination; "I will find out."

And he did; Juana told him, though with some confusion of detail, what had taken place.

"Just listen, señorito; apparently *la señora* told the señorita several days ago that she did not like it for her to be so late about getting dressed, because there might be callers. Ever since, the señorita has got ready in good season, but to-day she somehow forgot about it, and *la señora* scolded her. . . ."

"What did she say?"

"I don't know. *La señorita* did not want to tell me . . . but she cried hard enough."

Miguel went to his room, flushed with anger.

"Maximina, get ready and pack your trunks. . . . We

are going to leave this house this very moment. . . . I cannot allow any one to make you cry."

The young woman sat looking at her husband with an expression rather of fright than of gratitude.

"But suppose no one made me cry. . . . I cried without any reason for it. . . . I often do so. . . . You can ask my aunt if that is not so. . . ."

"Nonsense! we are going this very moment."

"Oh, Miguel! for Heaven's sake don't do so."

"Yes; let us go!"

Maximina threw herself into his arms, weeping.

"Don't do this, Miguel! don't do this! Quarrel with your mother for my sake? I would rather die!"

The young man's anger cooled down a little, and at last he agreed to say nothing about his vexation, though it was decided that they should go on the following day and sleep at their new rooms.

This was done; but *la brigadiera* was not blinded to the facts, and she easily saw through the motives that led Miguel to hasten his departure. It is needless to say that from that time Maximina in her eyes lost a large part of her appreciation.

The carpets were laid in their apartments in the Plaza de la Santa Ana, but as yet there was little furniture; only the dining-room, one dressing-room, and their chamber were in order, and that not entirely; chairs were scattered about over the rest of the house, and this and that wardrobe and mirror were as they had been left.

Nevertheless, Miguel and Maximina found it delightful. At last they were by themselves and were masters of their own movements; they were intoxicated with the delight of their freedom. This feeling of being in his own house was fascinating to Miguel; he looked upon it as something new and extraordinary.

Maximina wanted to make the bed herself, but alas! the mattress was so heavy that she could not turn it. Seeing that she was getting flushed with exertion, Miguel took hold and helped her get it into shape, laughing heartily all the time, though he could not have told why. Now it happened that our young couple had forgotten some of the things that were indispensable for living; among others, the lamps. When darkness came on, Juana had to go out in all haste to buy candles and a few candlesticks, so that they could see to eat their supper.

This first meal all to themselves was delicious. Maximina almost always had a tremendous appetite, which she felt to be a fault, and tried to hide it, so that she was apt to leave the table, still hungry. But now, with only her husband present, and thinking that he would not notice it, she put on her plate as much as she wanted. When they were through, Miguel said: —

"You have done well! you have eaten much more than you did during the days that we were at mamma's."

Maximina flushed as though she had been detected in doing something wrong. Instantly perceiving what was passing through her mind, Miguel came to her aid: —

"Come now; I see that you did not eat there because you were so timid. . . . You must know that nowadays it is considered fashionable to eat a good deal. . . . Besides, there is nothing that gives me so much pleasure as to see any one have a good appetite; especially if I am fond of that person! Consequently, if you want to give me a pleasure, you must try to keep it up. . . . As far as poor stomachs are concerned, mine is sufficient in one house."

That evening they determined to stay at home; they went from the dining-room to the library, which as yet was entirely unfurnished, since Miguel wished to take

his own time and consult his own taste in selecting the furniture for it. But in the dressing-room there was no fireplace, while here there was one. Juana kindled the fire and lighted a couple of candles. Miguel soon blew them out, preferring to let the fire alone light them. He wanted to go and get a couple of easy-chairs from the parlor, but Maximina said: —

"Get one for yourself, and not for me. . . . You will see I am going to sit down on the floor, for I like it better."

No sooner said than done; she sat down gracefully on the carpeted floor.

Her husband looked at her and smiled.

"Well, then; I am not going to get the chairs at all; I don't want to do otherwise than you do."

And he sat down by her side in front of the fireplace, the flames of which lighted up their smiling faces. The husband took his wife's hands, those plump hands, hardened but not injured by work, and passionately kissed them again and again. The wife did not want to be less affectionate than her husband, and after a little hesitation she took one of his and raised it to her lips. This little touch of innocence delighted Miguel, and he laughed.

"What makes you laugh?" asked the girl, looking at him in surprise.

"Nothing . . . pleasure!"

"No; you laughed in a naughty way. . . . What were you laughing at?"

"Nothing, I tell you. . . . It's all your imagination."

"But I tell you that you were laughing at me! Have I done anything amiss?"

"What could you have done, *tonta?* I laughed because it is not customary for ladies to kiss the hands of gentlemen!"

"But don't you see. . . . I am not a lady! and you are my husband!"

"You are right, . . ." said he, kissing her; . . . "you are right in all that you sày. Always do what your heart prompts you to do, as just now, and you need not fear of making any mistake."

The bluish flames danced gayly over the top of the coals, rising and disappearing every instant, as though they were listening to the words spoken by the young couple, and then hurrying off to report them to some gnome of the fire.

From time to time a bit of burning cinder would break off from the glowing mass, fall through the grate, and come rolling down at their feet. Then Maximina would wait till it had cooled a little, pick it up in her fingers, and toss it into the coal-hod. The only sound to be heard was the heavy rumble of carriages driving to the theatre. The conversation between husband and wife kept growing more and more lively and free. Maximina gradually lost her feeling of timidity, through the effect of Miguel's constant endeavors, and she summoned up her courage to ask him about his past life. The young man answered some of her questions frankly; others he did not hesitate to parry. Nevertheless, the young woman gathered that her husband had not been altogether what he should have been, and she was terrified.

"Ay, Miguel! how could you ever have been audacious enough to kiss a married woman? Aren't you afraid that God will punish you?"

The young man's face instantly darkened; a deep, ugly frown furrowed his brow, and for some time he remained lost in thought.

Maximina looked at him, with her eyes opened wide, and could not understand the reason for such a change in his expression.

At last, looking at the fire, he said, in a rather hoarse voice: —

"If such a thing happened in my case, and I knew of it, I am certain what I should do. . . . The first thing would be to turn my wife out of doors, whether it were night or day, the moment I found it out. . . ."

Poor Maximina was startled at such an outburst, as brutal as it was unexpected, and she exclaimed: —

"You would do well. Heavens! how shameful for a woman to be so brazen! . . . How much better it would be for her to die!"

The frown vanished from Miguel's brow; he looked tenderly at his wife, and feeling that such a talk was both useless and out of place, he kissed her hand, and said: —

"Why should we need to talk about the evil things that are done in the world? Fortunately, I have found a means of salvation: it is this hand; I will cling hold of it and be sure of being true and pure all my life long."

"You ought to ask forgiveness of God."

"I ask forgiveness of God and you, too?"

"As for me, I freely grant it."

"Then God will, also."

"How can you know that? . . . Ah, how foolish I am! I had forgotten that you went to confession only a few days ago."

"Yes; that was the way," said Miguel, who had likewise forgotten about it.

Afterwards, they talked about their domestic arrangement, their furniture, and the servants that they needed to hire.

Maximina argued that Juana and a cook would be sufficient. Miguel wanted another girl to do the sewing and laundry work. It was for this reason that he explained to his wife the extent of their resources.

"I have four thousand *duros*[1] income, but I want to let my sister and mamma have a thousand, so that they may live decently; . . . with three thousand *duros* a year we can get along first-rate."

"Oh! indeed we can. . . . Why don't you let your mamma and sister have half? Just think; they are used to luxury, and I am not. . . . I can get along with any kind of clothes."

"It is because I do not wish you to get along with any kind of clothes, but I want you to dress suitably."

"If you only knew how much it would please me to have you give half to your sister."

"It is impossible. . . . We must remember the possibility of children."

"Still, you would have a good deal left."

"You don't realize how much it costs to live in Madrid, dear."

After a moment of reflection he added: —

"On the whole, we won't do either; we will split the difference. I will allow them thirty thousand *reales*, and we will content ourselves with fifty thousand. What I am afraid of is, that I shall get a rascally brother-in-law who will run through the property."

Thus chatting, they spent the time till ten o'clock, and then they decided to go to bed. Miguel arose first and helped his wife to her feet; they lighted the candle and went to their room.

Maximina, according to custom, "blessed" the chamber, repeating a number of prayers which she had learned in the convent. Then they tranquilly went to sleep.

Just before dawn Miguel thought that he heard a singular noise at his side, and woke up. Instantly he

[1] Dollars: *pesos duros* or *pesos fuertos* is the full expression. It contains twenty *reales*.

was aware that his wife was kissing him on the neck, again and again, very gently, evidently with the idea of not disturbing his slumber; then, in an instant, he heard a sob.

"What is it, Maximina?" he asked, quickly turning over.

The girl's only answer was to throw her arms around him, and burst into a passion of tears.

"But what is it? Tell me quick! What is the matter?"

Choking with sobs, she managed to say: —

"Oh! I just had such bad dreams! . . . I dreamed that you turned me out of the house."

"Poor little darling!" exclaimed Miguel, fondling her tenderly; "your mind was impressed by what I said last evening. . . . I was a stupid blunderer!"

"I did not — know . . . what it was — How I suffered, *virgen mia!* I thought I should die! If I had not waked up I should have died! . . . But you are not stupid . . . I am, though!"

"Well, we both are; but calm yourself," he said, kissing her.

In a few moments both were sound asleep again.

IV.

Unusual silence reigned in the editorial rooms. Nothing was heard except the scratching of steel pens on paper. The editors were seated around a great table covered with oil-cloth; two or three, however, were writing at small pine tables, set in the corners of the room.

By and by one who had a beard just beginning to turn gray, raised his head, and said: —

"Tell me, Señor de Rivera, was not the motion determined upon for the eighteenth?"

Miguel, who was writing at one of the special tables, replied without lifting his head: —

"Señor Marroquín, I can't advise you too often to be more discreet. Try to realize that all our heads are in danger, from the humblest, like Señor Merelo y García's, up to the most stately and glorious, like our very worthy chief's."

The editors smiled. One of them inquired: —

"And what has become of Merelo? He has not been here at all yet."

"He can't come till twelve," replied Rivera. "From ten till twelve he is always engaged in plotting against institutions in the Café del Siglo."

"I thought that he was in Levante."

"No; he goes there last from two till three."

The first speaker was the very same Señor Marroquín of perpetual memory, Miguel's professor in the Colegio de la Merced, a born enemy of the Supreme Creator and a man as hirsute as a biped can possibly be. This was how he happened to be here: —

One day when Miguel was just finishing his breakfast, word was brought to him that a gentleman was waiting to see him in the library. This gentleman was Marroquín, who in his appearance resembled a beggar; he was so poor, dirty, and disreputable. When he saw his old pupil, he was deeply moved, strange as it may appear, and then told him with genuine eloquence that he had not a shilling, and that he and his children were starving to death, and at the end he begged him to find a place for him on the staff of *La Independencia*.

"I am not the owner of the journal, my dear Marroquín. The only thing that I can do for you is to give you a letter to General Count de Ríos."

He gave him the letter, and Marroquín presented himself with it at the general's house; but he had the ill fortune to go at a most inopportune moment when the general was raging up and down through the corridors of his house, like one possessed, and calling up the repertoire of objurgations for which he had been so distinguished when he was a sergeant.

The reason was that one of his little ones had drunk up a bottle of ink, under the impression that it was Valdepeñas. Whether oaths and invectives have any decisive influence upon events or not, we are unable to state; but the general used them with as much faith as though they had been a powerful antidote.

The victim was leaning his poor little head against the partition, shedding a copious flood of tears.

"What have you brought?" roared the count, casting a wrathful look upon Marroquín.

"This letter," replied the poor man, offering it with trembling hand.

"Vomit!" roared the general, with flaming eyes.

"What?" asked the professor, timidly.

"Vomit, child, vomit! or I will shake you out of your skin!" bellowed the illustrious chief of Torrelodones, seizing his son by the neck. . . . "And what does the letter say?"

"It is from Señor Rivera, asking a position on *La Independencia* for one who admires you."

"Can't you? Then put your fingers in your mouth! . . . Señor Rivera knows perfectly well that there is no position vacant; everything is full, and I am tormented to death with applications. . . . Let me see you stuff your fingers in, you little rascal, or I will do it myself!"

Marroquín acted prudently, by quietly opening the door and slipping out. Afterward Miguel spoke to the general

at a more propitious moment and succeeded in getting Marroquín a place on the staff at a monthly salary of five hundred reales.[1]

Among the other editors of *La Independencia* was an apostate and liberal priest who had let his beard grow long, and used to tell his friends secrets of the confessional when he had been drinking. He was one of Marroquín's intimates: both had the same grudge against the Divinity, and both were working enthusiastically to free humanity from its yoke. Nevertheless, one day he actually became ready to quarrel with the hirsute professor for turning the Eucharist into ridicule, which confirmed the former in his idea that "the priest was changing his views."

His name was Don Cayetano.

One other of the editors was a light-haired, handsome, and bashful young man, whose seat was in one of the corners of the room, and he lifted his head only when he overheard some brilliant sentence, for such things aroused his frantic admiration. His articles were always a mosaic of sonorous, titillating euphemisms, and adjectives, which formed a large proportion of Gómez de la Floresta's repertory: he played with them like a juggler; if any one desired to make him happy, he could find no easier way than by inventing some metaphor or making use of some harmonious adjective. Rivera, who knew this weakness of his, used to indulge him in it.

"This afternoon, gentlemen, I saw a woman whose glance was as bright as a Damascus blade."

Gómez de la Floresta's face would flush with pleasure, and he would look up with a smile of congratulation: —

"That means that it was a cold and cutting glance!"

"Her skin was smooth and brilliant with marble lines; her hair fell like a golden cataract upon her swan-like

[1] Twenty-five dollars.

neck, which was bound around with a diamond necklace, brilliant as drops of light. . . ."

"Drops of light! How felicitous that is, Rivera! how felicitous!"

"She was a woman capable of making life Oriental for a time."

"That is it! Taking refuge with her in a minaret, breathing the perfumes of Persia, letting her pearly fingers caress our locks, drinking from her mouth the nectar of delight!"

"I am delighted, Señor de Floresta, to see that you are consistent. Let us put a stop to it, nevertheless. You have been having an attack of phrases on the brain, and I fear a fatal termination."

The editor smiled in mortification and went on with his work.

A slender young man, with prominent cheek bones, almond-shaped eyes, and awkward gait, came in, making a great confusion, and humming a few strains of a waltz; he went up to the table where Miguel was writing, and giving him a slap on the shoulder, said, with a jolly tone: —

"*Holá*, friend Rivera!"

Miguel, without looking up, replied very solemnly: —

"Gently, gently, Señor Merelo! gently, we are not all on a level!"

The editors roared with laughter.

Merelo, a little touched, exclaimed: —

"This Rivera is always making jokes. . . . Now, señor, . . ." he went on to say, flinging his sombrero on the table. . . . "I have just this moment come from the tariff meeting at the Teatro del Circo. . . ."

"Who spoke? . . . Who spoke?" was asked from various parts of the room.

"Well, Don Gabriel Rodríguez, Moret y Prendergast, Figuerola, and our chief; but the one who made the best speech was Don Felix Bona."

"Man alive! and what did he say?"

"Well, he began by saying that he . . . the most insignificant of all that were there. . . ."

"Señor Merelo! and is it possible that you did not protest against such a statement?" asked Miguel from his table.

Merelo looked at him without seeing the force of his remark; but finally feeling the hidden prick of sarcasm, he made up a disgusted face and went on, affecting to scorn it: —

". . . That he had come there to speak in the name of Commerce at least. . . ."

"But, friend Merelo," interrupted the ex-curate, who greatly delighted in poking fun at the reporter, . . . "you surely ought to have protested against his claim to humility."

Merelo could to a certain point put up with Rivera's raillery, since he recognized his superiority, but the priest's went against his nerves. And so, full of wrath, he put his hands together after the manner of priests during mass, and intoned: —

"*Dominus vobiscum!*"

A general laugh went round among the editors. The curé flushed up to his ears, and, greatly disgusted, tried to shoot the same jest again, only winging it with a sharper point; but the reporter, who was not remarkable for his ingenuity, kept replying: —

"*Dominus vobiscum!*" And his intonation was so comical and clerical that the newspaper men had to hold their sides with laughter.

The priest finally became so irritated that instead of jests

he actually heaped insults on him. One of them was so outrageous and shameful that the latter felt called upon to raise his hand and give the priest a tremendous slap.

A scene of confusion and tumult arose in the office, lasting several moments. A number of men laid hold of Don Cayetano, who, with the exchange scissors in his hand, declared in an angry voice his intention of ripping Merelo open.

The latter, who did not care a rap for such a threat, roared to his companions to let him go: he would not put up with such blackguard language from any one. But his friends knew well that this was sheer rhetoric, and they clung to him all the more watchfully.

At last they succeeded in calming down the angry disputants, and the storm was followed by a calm that lasted for a quarter of an hour, during which all silently gave themselves up to their writing. At last Miguel looked up and asked: —

"See here, Señor Merelo, when do you expect to go to Rome?"

"To Rome? . . . What for?"

"To obtain pardon for the sin of having laid hands on a sacred person. You can't get absolution here."

A new shout of laughter ran through the office. The priest, in a fury, flung down his pen, took his hat, and left the room.

The editors of *La Independencia* lost much time in such skirmishes of wit, and our friend Rivera was almost always at the bottom of them.

Beside the men already mentioned, there were three or four of less distinction, and a throng of occasional contributors who came anxiously every night to bring the editor-in-chief their offering of articles, which, for the most part, were rejected.

Among all these, most attention was attracted by a young man, not as yet regularly attached to the staff, hideous, rickety, but well dressed, who was accustomed to write papers on literary criticism, always signed with the pseudonym *Rosa de té*, or Tea Rose. He was very severe on authors, and always felt it his duty to give them sound advice about the art which they practised. Time and again he assured them that this thing was not human, that was not like life, and the other was not in good form. He had a great deal to say about life, which, in his opinion, no author knew anything about, nor about women either. Only *Rosa de té* had a correct notion of the world and of woman's heart.

From the very beginning of his criticisms, he endeavored to put the author in the prisoner's box, while he himself mounted the judge's bench, wherefrom he would ask questions, administer blame, lay down the law, and make sarcastic and humorous flings.

"Where did Don Fulano[1] ever know of a young girl exclaiming, 'ah!' when she had the tooth-ache? . . . It is evident that Don Fulano has not often set foot in the salons of the aristocracy! . . . Life, Don Fulano, is not as you paint it; it is necessary to have lived within the charmed circle of society if one aspire to give a correct picture of it. . . . What we fail to find in Don Fulano's work is the plot. . . . And the plot, Don Fulano, the plot? . . . What kind of a character is the hero of his work? In one chapter he says that he has a tremendous appetite, and liked nothing better than to eat a box of Nantes sardines, and a few chapters further on he declares that he detests sardines! What kind of logic is that? Characters in art must be clearly defined, logical, not a patchwork. Don Fulano's *protagonista* here alone in the

[1] Equivalent to Mr. Such-an-one.

course of the work, according to our count, makes nineteen resolutions. Does Don Fulano think that nineteen resolutions are sufficient for a hero? Our opinion would be that it was not enough for even a subordinate character. . . . And so there is no way of preventing the character from being bungling, colorless, lacking in life and energy. Energy in the characters of novels and dramas I cannot weary of recommending to our authors. . . . Besides, you ought to endeavor, Don Fulano, to be more original. That remark made by Richard to the countess in the sixth chapter, where he says, . . . 'Señora, I shall never again set foot in this house,' we have read before in Walter Scott."

This young man had greatly pleased Miguel, who always called him the priest (*sacerdote*), because he had many times in his articles made use of the expression "the priesthood of criticism."

Rosa de té, so bold and scornful in his treatment of poets and novelists, was a very Job in the patience with which he bore the raillery of Miguel and the other editors.

One day, however, he had the misfortune to write a biting review of a poet who was one of Rivera's friends. Rivera was angry, and called him an ignoramus and a stupid lout to his face, and the poor *Rosa* could not get up to defend himself. When Mendoza came, Miguel, still vexed, said to him: —

"Now, see here, Perico, why do you allow this stupid baby to write literary reviews, and all the time make the paper ridiculous?"

Mendoza, as usual, made no answer. But Miguel insisted.

"I want you to explain to me why it is. . . ."

"We don't have to pay anything for his articles," replied the other, in a low voice.

"Then they are very dear!"

Although Miguel did not care much for politics, he worked diligently on the paper. The revolutionary atmosphere had sufficiently condensed itself, and no young man could escape its feverish and disturbing influence.

The Conde de Ríos was at last banished to the Balearic Islands. Mendoza suddenly disappeared from Madrid, leaving a letter to his friend Miguel, telling him that he had made his escape because he had been informed that the police were going to arrest him, and asking him to take charge of the paper.

Such a letter as that caused the brigadier's son no little amusement, because he was convinced that the administration had no thought of troubling the poor Brutandor.

Nevertheless, he actually took the chief editorship of *La Independencia*, the nominal direction of it being, as always in such calamitous times of persecution, under the name of a silent partner.

And, in order satisfactorily to fulfil his trust, he began to attend the so-called *círculos políticos*, and above all the committee-room of the Congress of Deputies, which was then, is now, and ever will be, probably, the workshop where the happiness of the country is devised. So when he went there for the first time, he could not overcome a feeling of respect and veneration.

At the sight of the stir and agitation which reigned there, our hero could not help comparing that chamber and the corridors around it to a great factory.

A host of laborers, in high hats, were going and coming, entering and bowing, and elbowing each other; their faces bore the imprint of the deep cares that agitated them. Some were sitting in front of desks and feverishly writing letters and more letters; from time to time they would pass their hands over their foreheads and

draw a sigh of weariness, and, perhaps, of pain at finding themselves obliged, on the altars of the country's interest, to deny a meeting with some influential elector who did not deserve such treatment.

Others would come out of the chamber of sessions and sit down on a sofa to think over the speech which they had just heard, or would join some group of members warmly discussing some question which, owing to a modesty that did them honor, they had not cared to take part in during the session.

Others would cluster around the entrance and anxiously wait for some minister to pass, so as to recommend to his attention some matter of general interest to his family.

All this reminded Miguel of the bustle, the noise, and the tremendous activity that he had witnessed in an iron foundry at Vizcaya. There as well as here men were moving in opposite directions, each one attending to his task; they were a little less respectably dressed, and their necks and breasts were somewhat more tanned than was the case with the representatives of their country; but this was because there was rather more heat in the foundry than in the *salón de conferencias.* In place of letters and other documents, the men there were lugging bars of red-hot iron in their hands, and they passed them on from one to the other just as the deputies passed on their papers.

It must not be supposed that it was cool in the *salón de conferencias.* In each one of its four angles there was a great fireplace where were burning ancient and well-dried logs, which the thoughtful country provides her representatives lest they should freeze. Besides, there are furnaces in the cellar which send up columns of hot air through the open registers; the carpets, the curtains,

the ventilators, and the screens also cause the temperature to be neither cold nor hot beyond endurance.

Unquestionably the system of heating is better understood in the *salón de conferencias* than in the foundry at Vizcaya.

Along its walls are large and comfortable sofas where the deputies and the newspaper men, who help them in the laborious task of saving the country, can rest for a few moments. And if they wish to refresh or restore their failing strength, there is, also, a lunch-room where the nation furnishes its managers, gratis, with water and *azucarillos*[1] in great abundance, and where, for a moderate price, they can get ham, turkey, pies, sherry, and Manzanilla, and other foods and drinks.

Intelligent and zealous waiters, as soon as they come in, relieve them of their overcoats, which they guard with care, and return after they have lunched, lest in any way they should catch cold.

Miguel was greatly impressed, when he first attended a meeting of the Congress, by the humility and deep respect shown by a waiter taking a fur overcoat from a gentleman with a long white goatee, who allowed him to do so, with a solemn and peevish expression, moving his head from one side to the other as though he could not hold it up with the weight of thoughts that filled it.

Afterwards he chanced to see this same gentleman in the lunch-room, taking a few slices of scalloped tongue; he had the same thoughtful, reserved, imposing air.

He was glad to know that his name was Señor Tarabilla, who had been governor of several of the provinces, superior honorary chief of the civil administration, and the holder of various other distinguished offices in Madrid and elsewhere. He had also been secretary of the commit-

[1] Sweetmeats made of flour, sugar, and rose-water.

tee of acts in the Congress, where once he had draughted a private bill which had never reached discussion.

Our hero enjoyed one of the purest satisfactions of his life in becoming acquainted with a personage of so great importance in politics, and he made up his mind to go on and gradually know them all in the same way. He used to go round from group to group, listening attentively to the discussions that were taking place among the most distinguished leaders of men. It was his duty to acquaint himself with their opinions and plans, so as to conduct his journal dexterously. He was surprised by some of these private debates, but especially at one which he overheard a few days after he entered the *salón de conferencias.*

In the centre of a large and crowded group there was a lively discussion going on between a minister and one of the leaders of the opposition concerning a certain article in the constitution of 1845, in which punishment by property confiscation is prohibited.

The minister held that this prohibition was not absolute; that in the article were shown the causes for which a citizen could be deprived of his property. The leader of the opposition screamed like one possessed, arguing that such was not the case; that there were no such causes, and no such things. Both grew very red in the face, and almost reached the point of getting actually angry with each other. Finally the minister asked energetically: —

"Now we will see, Señor M——; have you ever read the constitution of 1845?"

"No, sir, I have not read it, nor have I any desire to!" said Señor M——, in fury. . . . "Have you read it yourself?"

"No; but though I have not read it," replied the minister, putting on a bold face, "I know that in the first

section are indicated the causes which permit confiscation. . . . And if I have not, here is Señor R——, who was a minister at that time, and can tell us."

Señor R—— was an old gentleman, smoothly shaven; and when he heard his name called, and perceived that all eyes were turned upon him, with a smile that was half malicious and half abashed, he said: —

"The truth of the matter is that I myself cannot remember having read it through!"

At first these discussions and his constantly growing acquaintance with the great engine of politics entranced him; but afterwards, when he came to know by sight, and even have the honor of a personal acquaintance with almost all of the grandees of the kingdom, and had learned from their lips not a few of the secrets of governing nations, he had the sentiment to comprehend that he was beginning to weary of it all; most evenings he preferred to take a book of Shakspere, Goethe, Hegel, or Spinoza, and sit down by his wife's side, and read while she sewed or did her embroidery, rather than wander up and down the corridors of Congress, and listen to the dissertations of Señor Tarabilla and other distinguished men.

And I say that it was sentiment that taught him this; because an inner voice whispered to him that this was not the way to attain fortune and celebrity, nay, he should try to imitate step by step the career of Señor Tarabilla; but though that was the better course, he nevertheless determined to follow the worse, because human nature is weak, and often hurled to destruction by its passions. Even on those afternoons when he deigned to go up to the Congress, instead of joining the groups, taking up with the deputies, flattering the ministers, and offering his opinions in regard to whatever question might arise,

letting himself be carried away by melancholy (perhaps by the longing for his wife's company, his armchair, or his Shakspere), he would go and sit down alone on some sofa, and there give himself up to his thoughts or his dreams, and try to delude himself into the idea that he was fulfilling his duty.

He would look with distracted eyes at the throng of deputies, journalists and politicians tagging at their heels, and their feverish activity, their agitation, and their eagerness had not the slightest power to inspire the lazy fellow with the noble desire of laboring for his country, and contributing in some way to its happiness.

At times, not having anything to think about, he would amuse himself in seeking for resemblances between the men whom he saw and those whom he had known before. His attention was particularly attracted by a deputy, a custom-house director, who bore the closest resemblance to a certain fisherman of Rodillero, named Talín. He had known Talín under particularly sad circumstances. One of his sons had died of measles, and he had not a shilling in the house with which to bury him; the poor man had to carry him in his arms to the cemetery, and dig the grave himself. A few months afterward Talín was lost in a famous gale which has figured in more than one novel. And how closely this deputy resembled Talín! They were as like as two eggs.

There was another whose face was decorated with big scars and cicatrices, and whose eyebrows and eyelashes had been lost by reason of some secret malady which obliged him to go every year to Archena; this man struck him as particularly like a poor miner whom he had known at Langreo. The latter worked in the galleries of the mines, spending the livelong day in a narrow hole which he himself had laboriously to excavate. One

day the gas took fire and burned his face and hands horribly. After that he was obliged to beg.

When he was weary of these exercises of imagination, he would call Merelo y Garcia, and make him sit by his side, and delight in hearing him relate with characteristic vehemence all the gossip from behind the scenes, if it is not irreverent to compare the lobbies of Congress with the flies of a theatre.

Merelo was at that time the phœnix of Madrid *noticieros* and the envy of the other newspaper proprietors, who had more than once made him overtures of increased salary to get him away from the Conde de Rios; but Merelo, with fidelity that could not be too highly praised (and therefore he did not cease to praise it), had remained firm in his resistance to all temptations.

There was no one his equal in covering in a moment a dozen groups, in finding out what they were talking about, what they had been talking about, and what they were going to talk about, in gliding between the deputies' feet and discovering the most inviolate and carefully guarded secrets of politics, in worrying foreign envoys with questions, audaciously approaching the ministers, in tormenting the subordinates, and in "cutting out of every one whatever he had in his body," sometimes by suavity, at others by force.

Really Merelo y García was in Spain the pioneer of that pleiad of young reporters who, at the present day, make our press so illustrious; he it was who draughted the first lineaments of bills in the forms of questions and answers, though they afterward appeared so much changed. Still, in Merelo's time, they were as yet, as it were, in swaddling clothes, and Chinese and Moorish ambassadors did not answer in such a precise and categorical manner as they do now, when the reporters ask them, for example·

"How long were you on your journey? Were you able to get any sleep?" etc., etc.

Merelo was thus better known than the postman in all official centres and more feared than the cholera. When he made up his mind to find out about anything, neither sour faces nor rude replies could daunt him; he was proof against all rebuffs. It was told of him that one time when the Minister of State had just come out from a very important diplomatic meeting, Merelo met him with the question: —

"How now, Señor F——? is the matter of the treaty settled or not?"

The minister looked at him with curiosity, and asked: —

"What journal are you editor of?"

"Of *La Independencia*," replied Merelo, with a genial smile.

"I might have known it by the impudence which you show," retorted the minister coolly, turning on his heel.

The General Count de Rios used to tell at his receptions, with the tears of delight, of one famous exploit which Merelo's especial gifts had allowed him to accomplish.

He was at his favorite post of observation, like a watch-dog, at one of the doors of the *salón de conferencias*; he had been for some time on the scent for news, when he happened to see a page carry a telegram to the President of the Council of Ministers. The President opened it, read it carefully, and crumpled it in his hands with a frown, and then walked along with slow step to the lobby. Merelo was all alive, and followed him with ears alert, with eager eyes, and quivering nostrils. The President went to the wash-room. Merelo waited patiently. The President came out. Then Merelo's brain underwent a sudden and terrible revolution; he hesitated

a moment whether or not to follow him back; but at that instant he was inspired by one of those thoughts that illuminate the records of journalism; instead of following his quarry, he darted like a flash into the wash-room, looked, and hunted, and hunted. . . . At last, in an obscure spot, he found a bit of crumpled blue paper. He had no hesitation in pulling it out.

That evening *La Independencia* printed the following: —

"It seems that the preconization of the bishop-elect of Malaga, Señor N——, first cousin of the President of the Council of Ministers, meets with opposition in Rome."

The President read this notice as he was going to bed, and he was greatly surprised, as he afterwards confessed to his friends, because the report of the Pope's opposition to his cousin's confirmation had been telegraphed to him by the ambassador. Racking his memory, he recalled the fact that that afternoon, after reading the telegram, he had been followed along the lobby of Congress by a shadow, and that the shadow was waiting when he had come out of the wash-room. The President instantly guessed how the cat was let out of the bag, and burst into a roar of laughter. "That was a good joke," he exclaimed, as he put out the light.

V.

UTRILLA had gone to bed, feverish and nervous. And it was with very good reason. For the second time he had failed to pass his examination; he was as good as expelled from the Military Academy.[1]

His prescient heart had told him before the examination: "Jacobo, they will certainly ask you about the

[1] Academia de Estado Mayor.

pendulum, and that is the very thing in which you are weakest!"

And indeed he had scarcely taken his seat before the tribunal, when, *zas!* the professor of physics said to him in a wheedling accent: —

"Señor Utrilla, have the goodness to explain for us the theory of the pendulum."

The cadet, rather pale, arose and looked with wild eyes at the professor's desk. . . . The algebra professor smiled ironically, as though he divined his confusion. Why had that old man taken such a dislike to him? Utrilla could not explain it otherwise than by envy; the professor had seen him at the theatre with Julita under his protection. He arose, and with uncertain steps went to the slaughter; that is, to the blackboard. With trembling hand he made a few ciphers, and at the end of fifteen minutes drew a deep sigh of relief, and returned to his seat. The professor of physics shook his head several times: —

"That is wrong, Señor Utrilla; that is wrong."

The cadet sponged out the figures that he made, and began the operation a second time. A second quarter of an hour, a second sigh of relief; more negative signs on the part of the professor.

"That is just as wrong, Señor Utrilla."

And Utrilla rubbed out his work again, and for the third time began to cipher; but now he was weak, confused, livid, persuaded that death was at hand.

"Still entirely wrong, Señor Utrilla," exclaimed the professor, in a tone of compassion.

The algebra man smiled mephistopheleanly, and said, with an affected accent in pure Andalusian: —

"There be three ways of spellin' proctor . . . *pa*roctor, *pe*roctor, *po*roctor!" [1]

[1] *De tre manera lo sé ési . . . percurador, porcurador, precurador.*

The gentlemen of the tribunal covered their eyes with their hands to hide their amusement. This sneer cut our cadet to the heart; he changed color several times in the course of a few moments.

"That will do; you are dismissed," said the professor of physics, trying in vain to put on a sober face.

The son of Mars retired, stumbling over everything in his way, as though he were blind; his neck was swollen, his Adam's apple preternaturally prominent, his heart boiling over with indignation and wrath.

As soon as he reached home, by the advice of the housekeeper he fainted away. His father, on learning the cause, instead of helping him, was furious, and exclaimed: —

"You might better die, you great good-for-nothing! This fellow has used up more of my patience and money than he is worth!"

Afterwards came the following family scene. When he recovered from his fainting fit, he was informed that his father and brother were waiting for him in the office on the first floor. Here our young soldier had to endure a new and grievous humiliation. His father attacked him in a rage, called him an imbecile and a blunderbuss, and showed him the book in which he had kept account of his expenses.

"For so many months of tutoring in mathematics, so much; drawing lessons, so much; dress uniform, so much; every day ditto, so much," etc., etc.

While his *señor padre* was lecturing him in an unnaturally high voice on this subject, his older brother was gnashing his teeth like one in torment; from time to time he gave utterance to pitiful groans, as though some demon had come that very moment to throw more coal in the furnace where they were roasting him. At last, when he

succeeded in getting his breath, he exclaimed in a low voice: —

"The idea of a man having to humiliate himself from morning till night engaged in handling fat and lard in order that what he earns should be wasted by a fellow like this, in folderols and glasses of cognac!"

"It shall not be so any longer, Rafael! I swear it shall not!" roared the father. "After to-day this lazybones shall help you in the factory. There he will have a chance to learn how to earn his bread and butter!"

The ex-cadet was annihilated. He, a gentleman cadet in the most aristocratic corps of the army, to be suddenly transferred into the service of a candle factory! This for Utrilla was the height of degradation. He said nothing for a few moments: at last he spoke solemnly and deliberately in his deep bass: —

"If it has come to this, that my dignity must be lowered by making me a factory foreman, it would be better that I should be taken out into the field and shot down with half a dozen bullets!"

"Knocked down with half a dozen sticks; that's what you ought to have done to you, you good-for-nothing idler! Just wait! just wait!"

And the worthy manufacturer glanced angrily around the room, and seeing a reed cane leaning against the wall, he sprang to get it. But Achilles, he of the winged feet, had already darted out of the room, and in half a dozen leaps had reached his chamber.

Once across the threshold, he bolted the door with marvellous dexterity, and after listening breathlessly with his ear at the keyhole, in order to make sure that Peleus had not passed the middle of the corridor, he felt safe to give himself up to meditation.

He began to promenade up and down, across the room,

from corner to corner, with his hands in his pockets, his head sunk and his shoulders lifted, thinking seriously how . . .

But his sword was constantly thumping against the furniture and getting between his legs, and making it hard for him to walk; he took it off and flung it in military disgust on the sofa.

He came to the conclusion that two courses lay before him: one was to make his escape from the house, enlist in the army, and in this way fulfil the only vocation for which he felt any call; the other was to enter the factory and work there like his brother. It was necessary to make a decisive resolution, as became his inflexible and energetic character; and in very truth our ex-cadet, with an energy that has few examples in this degenerate epoch, promptly decided to work in the candle factory.

This important point having been settled, he became calmer, and could stop long enough to roll and smoke a cigarette.

One other thing, however, remained to be done, and this was one of great importance: to wipe out the insult which the algebra professor had given him during the examination. Utrilla argued in this way: —

If he remained in the army, the affront would not have been serious, because, of course, discipline forbid the inferior to demand satisfaction for insults from a superior; but once out of the corps and transformed into a civilian, the matter put on a different aspect — "Certainly very different!" he repeated, putting on a deep frown that was very imposing. "To-morrow I will settle this point."

And in this desperate state of mind our cadet set himself to work to indite the draft of a letter which he proposed to send to the algebra teacher.

"My dear Sir: —

"If you have any delicacy (which I have reason to doubt) you will perfectly understand that after the coarse insult which you took pains to give me yesterday, enjoying the advantage of your position, it is absolutely necessary that one or the other of us should vanish from the earth. As for the proper remedy, you will be kind enough to come to an understanding with my two friends Señor —— and Señor—— (*Here will be two blanks for the names of my seconds, for I have not yet decided who they will be*). I remain, Sir, at your command, etc."

After reading this letter three or four times, it seemed to him that it was not forcible enough. He tore it up, and at one breath wrote this one: —

"Sir: You are a scoundrel. If this intentional insult is not sufficient to bring your seconds, I shall have the pleasure of flinging it in your face. Your servant, who subscribes his name,

"Jacobo Utrilla."

Perfectly satisfied with the content and form of this last missive, the heroic lad copied it off with particular care, closed it with sealing-wax, and directed it; then he left it in his table drawer until the next day, when he proposed sending it to its destination.

By this time night had come, and he went to bed without any desire to eat supper. Sleep delayed her visit; the angel of desolation flapped her pinions over his brow, and inspired him with the most terrific plans of destruction. And doubtless at that very hour the algebra professor was tranquilly sleeping without the slightest suspicion of the misfortune overhanging him.

When this suggestion presented itself to Utrilla, he

could not help smiling in a most sinister fashion between the sheets.

At last Morpheus succeeded in overcoming him, but with no intention of sending sweet and refreshing dreams; a thousand gloomy nightmares tormented him all night long; from one o'clock till six in the morning he battled with his enemy, using all the methods known at the present day, and some of his own invention. Now he beheld himself facing the hateful professor with a foil in his hand; the professor had wounded him in the right hand, but nevertheless Utrilla, without a moment's hesitation, exclaimed: "Come on. Use the left hand!" filling all the witnesses full of admiration at his coolness. And with his left hand, *zas!* after a few thrusts he had buried the sword up to the hilt in his body!

Then they appeared each with pistol in hand; the seconds give the signal to aim; the professor fires, and his ball grazes his cheek; then he aims, and keeps aiming, and the professor, now seeing death at hand, falls on his knees and begs for his life; he grants his prayer, firing into the air, but not without first saying scornfully: "And to think of this man insulting Jacobo Utrilla!"

Divine Aurora, the goddess with the saffron veil, was already descending the heights of Guadarrama, when the stripling awoke in the same prophetic state of mind. Sad day that was now beginning to dawn for an innocent family, for the algebra professor's six children, had not Jupiter hastened to send to the hero's bolster his daughter Minerva in the form of the housekeeper.

"Jacobito, my dear, will you be perishing of weakness, my child! Here I have some chocolate and spiral cakes which you like so much."

The lad rubbed his eyes, cast an excessively severe look at the chocolate which was so compassionately

brought him, and made up his mind to take it, but not before he had gnashed his teeth in such a desperate fashion that the good Doña Adelaida was alarmed.

"Come, come, Jacobito, my son, don't grieve, don't be so much troubled, because you will be sure to fall sick. . . . There is no help for it. . . . Going to bed without taking anything was a piece of folly. Your father will come round all right, and finally everything will be settled as you want it. You certainly must have had a very bad night! You must not go on this way trifling with your stomach! . . . And now what are you going to do, my son? I am afraid for you with such a rash disposition as God has given you!"

When Jacobo heard this question, he for a moment suspended the hateful task of swallowing his chocolate, raised his angry face to the housekeeper, and shouted with concentrated fury: —

"What am I going to do! . . . You shall see, you shall see what I am going to do!"

And then he once more began to grit his teeth so terribly that Doña Adelaida was frightened out of her wits, and exclaimed: —

"Come now, calm yourself, calm yourself, Jacobito! You know that I was present when you were born, and that your sainted mother, who left you when you were a mere baby — poor woman! — charged me to have a watchful eye over you. If you should do anything desperate, you will kill me with sorrow. . . . Come, my son, tell me what you intend to do. . . ."

The lad, pushing away the chocolate cup with an energetic movement, and rolling his eyes frenziedly, screamed rather than said: —

"Do you want to know what I am going to do? . . . Then I will tell you this very instant. . . . I am going to

the factory, I am going to put on a blouse, I am going to daub my hands with grease, pull the candle moulds, and roast my face in front of the furnaces. . . . And when any stranger comes to the factory, the hands will be able to say: 'This man whom you see — dirty, nasty, ill-smelling — used to be a gentleman cadet, a cadet in the Military Academy! . . . Ah!" he said, concluding with a muffled voice, "Ah! no one knows, no one knows what Jacobo Utrilla is capable of!"

The housekeeper, who was expecting some desperate resolution, when she found that it was of this sort, could not refrain from a cry of joy.

"That is right, my son, that is right! That is the best way of heaping coals of fire on the heads of your father and brother, who have been pestering me to death by saying that you were of no use, that you were a lazy-bones. . . ."

"But before doing that," interrupted Jacobo, extending both hands as though he were trying to hold back the avalanche which was about to fall, "it is necessary that one of us two perish!"

"Merciful Virgin!" exclaimed Doña Adelaida. "Who is going to perish, Jacobito? For Heaven's sake, don't go lose your mind! Do you want your father to die?"

"Not him, señora, not him! I refer to my algebra professor, with whom this afternoon or to-morrow at the very latest, I am going to fight a duel!"

"And what has the algebra professor done to you? Made you fail in your examination? Now if you had studied, as your father told you to do, this would not have happened."

"Señora," cried Jacobo, in a stentorian voice so fiendish that Doña Adelaida in affright took a step or two backward, "don't you dare to speak about what you do

not understand! I cannot get over my vexation that I ever had anything to do with algebra. What the professor did was to sneer at me, and this, my father's son cannot put up with! Do you understand?"

"Come, calm yourself, Jacobito; you have been very much disturbed since yesterday. Perhaps it is not as bad as you think. It may be that this gentleman did not sneer at you on purpose."

"He may not have done it intentionally, but the fact is, he insulted me, and I will not stand it; I never have yet, and I never intend to let any one insult me with impunity. You know very well that in this respect I am a peculiar man."

"I know it, Jacobito; you have the same disposition as your grandfather (peace to his soul!). What a man he was! He was as quick to flare up as gunpowder! Just think; one time when he was shaving, he heard a cry in the court; he turned his head so suddenly that he gave himself a tremendous cut in the nose. . . . But it is necessary, my son, to have self-restraint, and repress one's nature a little, if one would live in this world. It is my idea that if this professor made sport of you, what you ought to do is to make sport of him!"

With slight variations, such was the advice that in the early days of Greece, Minerva, the goddess of the glorious eyes, gave the divine Achilles in his famous quarrel with Agamemnon, the son of Atreus.

We are obliged to confess that this hero of ours did not show himself so amenable to the goddess's commands as "Peleus' godlike son"; instead of immediately sheathing his sword and yielding, he refused to make use of any other measures than those of force.

The only concession that Doña Adelaida could obtain after many prayers was to postpone the professor's destruction till another day.

That same morning, however, he put into effect his energetic decision of going to the factory and working there all day long "like a dog," whereby it is to be supposed that he quite put his father and brother to shame and confusion, though they succeeded in hiding it perfectly.

The greater part of the difficulties due to his exceptional position having been thus overcome, thanks to his incredible boldness and *sang froid*, the only thing that troubled him now was lest Julita would not take in good part this premature retirement from the military service. So it was that he delayed for several days telling her about it; but it was not altogether that he was afraid of annoying her; the fact was that for some time he had not seen his sweetheart as frequently as formerly. It was ominous that Julita nowadays appeared but seldom on her balcony, and it was not less significant that she was putting obstacles in the way of his sending letters regularly. Still Utrilla wrote informing her that, "owing to family reasons, and for the purpose of attending to his pecuniary interests, he had retired from the service."

This was the only dignified way that he could find of saying that he had been dismissed.

Contrary to his expectations, this information did not produce any great effect. On the other hand, she waited five or six days before she answered it, and at the end she wrote:—

"That if he had given up his career because it was convenient, he did perfectly right; but that henceforth he would do her the favor not to send letters to her through the door-maid, since she had certain reasons for objecting to it, and that he should wait until she told him to whom he should entrust his letters."

It happened that Miguel during these days twice met

the ex-cadet. The latter was so glad to see him, and showed him so much affection and friendliness, that Rivera could not help reciprocating it, carrying his magnanimity to such an extent as to call him once or twice his future brother-in-law.

"If there is no way of preventing my sister from marrying a rascal, it would be better to have you, friend Utrilla," said he.

The former cadet swelled with delight until he almost burst, not only at the prospect of marrying Julita, but also to hear himself called a rascal in such a genial way.

At both interviews he urged Rivera warmly to come and visit his factory, because he was very anxious to show it to him, and to explain the great improvements that he was planning to make in it, if his father and brother, both whom were very conservative, did not make too strong opposition. He expressed his desire so eagerly that finally one afternoon Miguel decided to take a carriage and drive to Cuatros Caminos, from which it was easy to reach the candle factory of Utrilla and Company.

"Is Señor Utrilla here?"

"Don Manuel does not often come to the factory; he lives at forty-six Sacramento Street."

"I want to see his son."

"Ah! Don Rafael," said the door-keeper. "Yes, sir; he is here. Walk in."

"It is Don Jacobo whom I want to see."

"Don Jacobo," repeated the door-keeper, hesitating and smiling. "Ah yes, sir, Jacobito; I had forgotten. He is here too. Walk in."

Jacobo was writing in the same room with his elder brother, who, when he saw that it was a friend of Jacobo, scarcely deigned to lift his head, and gave a slight nod.

Utrilla, however, colored to the ears, and came to greet him with great eagerness.

"Don Miguel! You here? How glad I am! . . . Rafael," he added, addressing his brother, "I am going to show the factory to Señor Rivera."

Rafael without looking up, said: —

"Very well."

They went out of the office and passed slowly through the shops, stopping to examine the mechanism of each process, which Utrilla explained in a loud voice. From time to time he would say in an imperious tone: —

"José, run this mould! . . . Enrique, lift this lid!"

The workmen were in no haste to obey these orders, and he had to repeat them in a voice which any operatic basso would have envied.

The ex-cadet's factory garb could not have been more appropriate, — trousers of drilling, red shirt, shoes, and an old coat with the collar turned up. Although it was very warm, Utrilla, both on the street and at home, always wore his collar this way, which gave him the appearance of being a very dissipated man, and this was something that delighted him.

In the rooms where the women were working, Utrilla allowed himself to take some liberties with the operatives, such as winking at them, twitching at their handkerchiefs, and making this or that dubious little witticism.

"You will excuse me, Don Miguel; these are the bad habits of military life. Though one were going to be shot, one couldn't help saying some nonsense to the girls."

"All right, all right, friend Utrilla; don't incommode yourself on my account."

"Man alive, you are going now to see something very

original which I happened to think of doing the other day. You will be surprised. . . . The foreman of the shop said to me, 'What you don't think of, the Devil himself would not think of!'"

"Let us see it."

He then took him to the storeroom, and opening a closet, showed him a number of packages of candles with lithographed labels, which read:—

JULIA
(Bujía Extrafina).

"How is that?" he demanded, with radiant and triumphant face.

"Very pretty! very delicate!" replied Miguel, smiling.

"Take a package!"

"My dear fellow, no, thank you!"

"Nonsense! take one. If you don't, then I shall send one to you."

From there he took him to a room that was a sort of incommodious private office, with a wretched straw-stuffed sofa, a few chairs, and a table with a writing-desk on it; on the wall hung a panoply with the cadet's military outfit,—sword, belt, spurs, and a couple of foils and a fencing-mask.

Utrilla confessed to his friend that he could not look at this panoply without sadness, recollecting "the happy days in the service."

"What life is so happy as the military! Believe me, Señor Rivera, that in spite of the strictness of the rules, I miss it immensely."

Afterwards he offered him a cigar, and taking out a

huge meerschaum mouthpiece, he began calmly to color it, calling up at the same time, with a veteran's satisfaction, various anecdotes of his academy life.

"That cigarette-holder is very pretty: what does it represent?"

"A cannon on a pile of projectiles; I beg of you to take it, Don Miguel."

"I do not need it," replied Rivera, handing it back. . . . "It is in very good hands."

"But I should be much better pleased to have you keep it, and I won't take it."

"Come now, friend Utrilla, don't be so lavish."

"Throw it down if you please, but I will not take it."

There was nothing to be done but keep it.

Then the former cadet brought the conversation round to Julia, and besought her brother's intercession, as he had written her four letters and had received not a single answer.

"You will understand, my dear Utrilla," said Miguel, becoming serious, "that this is a very delicate matter, and that I have no right to mix myself up in your affairs."

"The trouble is," rejoined the ex-cadet, with a sigh, "with the passionate nature which God gave me, I sent her a letter to-day, telling her that if she persisted in her conduct, she would do me the favor never to write to me again, . . . and I am afraid that she is really offended."

"I am afraid," said Miguel, laughing, "that your command will be fulfilled to the letter."

The cadet remained for several moments pensive and gloomy. Then shaking himself from his melancholy stupor, and passing his hand over his forehead, he said:—

"By the way, Don Miguel, you have not washed your hands."

Rivera looked at him in surprise.

"One always gets dirty in the factory," continued the cadet. "Here is a bowl and soap for you."

"Thank you; my hands are not dirty."

But Utrilla at the same time offered him a china bowl filled with clear water, and the soap-dish, in such a way that Miguel rather than appear the enemy of cleanliness yielded and washed his hands. The soap was strongly scented with orange.

"Do you know this soap is very fine and pleasant?" said Rivera, so as to say something.

"Do you like it? . . . Then I am going to give you a cake of it."

"My friend, I beg of you!"

Utrilla, without heeding his protests, got the soap out of the desk, wrapped it up in a piece of paper, and almost by main force thrust it into his pocket. From that time forth Miguel took care not to commend anything which he happened to touch.

As he was going, the ex-cadet shook his hand ardently, and said in a voice full of emotion: —

"Don't fail to speak to her. If you knew how sad and desperate I am."

The truth of the matter was that he had good reason to be, as will appear in the next chapter.

VI.

"If your son were to put up at a hotel while I have a house in Madrid, I should be seriously vexed with him, and with you too," *la brigadiera* Angela had written to her cousin María Antonia.

And her cousin replied: —

"I have sent a copy of your letter to Alfonso, and

assured him that he would enjoy much staying with you. Although he always rebels against my advice, I hope that this time he will gratify me. But I am afraid, my dear, that his visit may cause you a good deal of trouble, for I don't know what kind of habits he has contracted in Paris; but you have asked for it, and you can try it."

La brigadiera caused the rooms that Miguel had occupied to be put in order with so much care and nicety, worried her daughter Julia so desperately in the details of the appointments, the curtains, etc., that the girl when she spoke of her cousin always spoke of him as "*el niño de la bola.*"[1]

Before she made his acquaintance, she conceived a violent antipathy to him. This was caused in no small measure, because the visitor twice disappointed them about coming. The reports that she had heard about him were not very favorable either.

Alfonso Saavedra had lost his father when he was very young: he was the inheritor of a considerable fortune; his mother had not had sufficient energy or ability to train him properly; he had not chosen any definite career; his only occupation was amusement, and allowing free course to his passions, which, according to what people said, could not have been more violent. Very amusing stories were told about him, and some that were extremely displeasing: he had been living in Paris almost constantly since he was a young lad, and there he had largely squandered his estate, but as he had still large expectations from his mother's property, which was even larger than his father's, he lived without apprehension of the future, and spent his money lavishly.

Finally, a telegram was received announcing the departure from Paris of *el niño de la bola.*

[1] Almost corresponding to our vulgar "son of a gun."

And on the morning of the following day he arrived. When Julia heard the bell ring, feeling disturbed, she went to the sewing-room and began to jest with the maid about the style which her cousin affected; then there was heard in the corridor a great commotion of moving luggage.

"What room has he been shown into, Inocencia?" she asked of the girl who came in at that moment.

"He is in the library with your mamma."

In a few moments a powerful ring at the bell was heard.

"The señora is calling," said Inocencia, running.

"Señorita will please come immediately to the library, says your mamma," she announced, on returning.

"Very well," the girl replied, in bad humor. "Are they sitting down?"

"Yes, señorita."

"Then they can wait without hurting them any."

But in a few minutes the pull at the bell was repeated with more violence, and the girl, foreseeing her mother's vexation, arose with a very bad grace, and dropping her sewing, exclaimed with a scornful accent: —

"There now, we are going to see Don Alfonso, Prince of Asturias!"

Don Alfonso was a man of about thirty-five, a gay bachelor, with regular features, with shaven cheeks, and mustaches twisted in the French style; in his wavy, black hair gleamed here and there a thread of silver; otherwise, his fresh and ruddy cheeks, his white and carefully brushed teeth, and his easy, graceful gestures, made him seem like a boy; his travelling-costume was affectedly elegant, with certain Parisian refinements unknown in Madrid. Julita took all this in at one rapid glance. He was not at all the man that she expected to meet. Having heard her cousin spoken of as a spendthrift, she had always imagined him as jaundiced, lean, scrubby, and inflicted with a

cough, like some hair-brained Madrileños whom she knew by sight.

When he saw the young lady, he arose hastily to his feet.

"Oh, what a pretty cousin!" he exclaimed, at the same time taking her hand in a frank and affectionate manner. "You will forgive me for having disturbed you in what you were doing, will you not?"

"I was not doing anything. . . . Won't you sit down, sir?"

Don Alfonso remained a moment in a state of uncertainty, and then as he sat down, he exclaimed with a gesture of resignation: —

"What a terrible blow to my illusions, aunt! Your daughter has not dared to say *thou* to me. . . . These cursed gray hairs!"

Julita flushed a deep crimson.

"That is not the reason!"

"Then it is because you have been prejudiced against me; confess it! . . . But it is not my fault either that I am old, or that your mamma has disturbed you on my account."

Julita, flushing deeper and deeper, did not know how to defend herself; her mother came to her aid.

"It is neither the one thing nor the other, Alfonso; the trouble is that, as having never met you before, she is confused."

"Is that so?" he asked his cousin, at the same time looking at her with a bright smile.

Julita gave an affirmative gesture, and returned his smile.

"That is not so bad. . . . But I still feel a keen sense of remorse. It will be very gratifying to me if you will tell me that I am forgiven."

Julita, with difficulty overcoming the timidity that choked her, said in a low tone: —

"I have nothing to forgive you for."

"Thanks, little coz," pursued Don Alfonso, rising, and with an elegant and graceful gesture again shaking hands with her.

Then he began to talk with his aunt about family affairs; asking her many questions about his whole circle of relatives, and learning many particulars of which he had been ignorant.

Then the conversation turned on the customs of Paris, which he described pleasantly and attractively, taking pains to extol Spain, instead of depreciating it as the majority of travellers are in the habit of doing. This appealed to *la brigadiera's* sympathies. Don Alfonso spoke easily and naturally, but without conceit; on the contrary, in the midst of his talk, he would correct any idea that seemed at all pretentious, and was evidently anxious to show that he had no wish whatever to make himself out a remarkable man.

If he spoke of women, all had "given him the mitten"; if he spoke of art, or gave his opinion about museums and singers, he protested that he had little or no knowledge of painting or music; if by chance he was obliged to refer to any quarrel in which he himself had taken part, he passed over it lightly, and did not fail to have it understood that he had done everything possible to avoid it, and at the same time he made sport of the duel and of duelists.

As Don Alfonso had the reputation of being lucky in love affairs, and many of his adventures had made considerable talk, as he played the piano pretty well, and was accounted one of the crack marksman of Paris, and had fought more than a dozen duels, this modesty of his

in conversation was a refreshing contrast, sure of bringing success in society. These accomplishments were rendered still more attractive by the slight foreign accent which made his words all the more insinuating and suave.

Julita listened to him, gazing at him with that intense and conjuring look by which young girls in an instant analyze all a man's physical and moral nature.

Her cousin made a very favorable showing as the result of the analysis; she had no idea that he was such an amiable and attractive man; the incidents of his life which she had heard before gave him the reputation of being haughty and violent in character, if not even coarse and shameless.

One evening in Seville he was engaged in playing ombre, and because he was not very successful, he became so much excited that he said all sorts of impudent things, and finally told the ladies present that he was going to ride into the parlor on his nag. No one placed any credence in what he said, and he went out without any one noticing it; but in a few minutes he made his appearance on horseback, to the amazement and terror of all, especially the ladies, who began to scream, while he, striking the spurs into his horse, roared with laughter.

On another occasion, being deep in an intrigue with a young woman of the middle class, he went in full dress to the house of her parents, and told them that he wished to speak with them on a very private and serious matter. The father, who was a humble government employé, imagining, as any one might have supposed, that he was going to ask his daughter's hand, received him trembling with emotion; then after many periphrases and circumlocutions, Saavedra ended by asking him to give him a favorable report on a certain matter that he had in his department.

This hateful piece of drollery was noised over the whole town, and put that poor innocent señor in a most ridiculous light.

But Julita, as she saw and listened to him, forgot these and other escapades; unquestionably this young man, who in her presence was so refined and modest, was an entirely different person.

Saavedra after showing such gallantry to his cousin, waited a long time before he addressed her, or even looked at her; he seemed to be absorbed in his conversation with her mother. Thus it was that she had an abundance of time to make a careful scrutiny of his appearance: his shirt-collar, his cravat, his watch-chain, his boots, all were elegant, and proved by their style that they came from the other side of the Pyrenees.

"You will feel like getting the dust off and having a wash, Alfonso," said *la brigadiera*. "Come; we will show you to your room: it is the one which my son Miguel used to occupy."

Don Alfonso could not praise it sufficiently: he found everything to his taste.

"I shall be just like a fish in the water here. You will have trouble in getting rid of me, I assure you!"

"I will warn you," said Julia, "that it was I who made the bed myself. Don't you dare say that you have not slept well."

As soon as she had said these words, which by their mischievous spirit were perfectly proper, she repented having said them, and blushed. Don Alfonso turned his face upon her, and looked at her with some friendly curiosity.

"That is the very reason that I shall not sleep well. You were unkind to tell me."

Julita blushed more than ever, and to hide her confu-

sion began to straighten the bottles on the dressing-table, and then she left the room. Finally her mother also went, leaving him to himself, and shortly afterward he again appeared in the parlor, in another costume of the latest and most elegant style.

"Julita," said her mother, "tell them to put on the breakfast; you must feel weary, Alfonso."

"No, aunt; I feel hungry, though. The word is more prosaic, but it is nearer the truth."

La brigadiera, with a laugh, accepted the arm which her nephew offered her as they went to the dining-room. During the meal he entertained the ladies in the same agreeable fashion, telling them a thousand curious incidents, giving them minute descriptions of the *soirées* in the fashionable society of Paris. They were most interested in what he had to say about the ladies' dresses and the decoration of the salons.

During the conversation he never once forgot those gallant and thoughtful attentions which were demanded by his situation. By intuition he discovered when Julita's wine-glass was empty; he offered his aunt the olives; he passed her the mustard, cut the bread for her, etc.

Julia was merry, and perhaps rather more talkative than usual; but when she made use of any expression that was a little more piquante than usual, she would feel her cheeks flush under her cousin's steady, smiling, and somewhat ironical gaze.

It was the first time that she had ever forced herself to be witty and sharp and say sharp things. When she said anything that was particularly clever, Saavedra would look up, and his smile would seem to say, "This little girl is bright."

Julia was rather humiliated by his smile at first, but then she read under it an expression of scornful protection, or

at least of absolute indifference, scarcely masked by the extreme courtesy which he showed in all his words and gestures. For in this respect Don Alfonso did not weary a single instant; he did not miss a single opportunity of showing them his subordination, and of giving both his aunt and cousin to feel how agreeable he could be to them.

In the days that followed, his gallantry did not in the least relax. *La brigadiera* wrote her cousin, assuring her that "she would keep her nephew not merely a month, but all his life in her house; that he was a perfect gentleman, and that young men could not in Spain possibly acquire such an admirable education and such manners as he possessed."

A hearty and perfect confidence quickly grew between him and Julia; the girl amused him with her lively and picturesque chatter which recalled to the exile his years of childhood and youth.

Don Alfonso played the guitar as well as the piano, and to his skill and facility in singing Polish and Spanish songs was due in no small measure his social success in Parisian society. But there he played and sang to attract the notice of the ladies and make himself known, while here it was for his own pleasure or to bring to mind happy days or events.

When he came home in the afternoon an hour before dinner, he was fond of sitting by his cousin's side, with the guitar on his knees, and singing his whole repertoire, not only of classic songs, but also of the serenades,[1] *habaneras*, and polkas of his earlier days. Julia recalled some that he had forgotten, and whenever this happened he clapped his hands with delight, and enthusiastically praised his cousin's memory.

[1] *Pasacalle;* song with guitar accompaniment sung on the street.

She was in her element those days; she had some one to talk with, and she was amused a large part of the day in looking out for the visitor's wants, superintending the ironing of his linen, and seeing that his room was kept neat and clean, and in inspecting with childish curiosity his belongings; and then she heard herself constantly called all sorts of pet adjectives.[1] And what young girl on the face of the earth would not enjoy this? Don Alfonso had certainly remarkable gifts in the way of giving compliments without repeating himself, and without descending to eternal vulgarities, and he was very skilful in finding occasion to say something pleasant about the maiden's charms. . . . Now it was her hands: "pretty enough to eat"; now it was her teeth: "abroad very few such splendid ones were to be seen"; again, it was her jet-black hair: "I am tired of seeing nothing but tow on women's heads."

Without noticing it, the girl began to wait impatiently afternoons for her cousin's coming, and if anything delayed him, she would keep jumping up from her seat, and then coming back to it again without any reason.

It was during these days that our droll friend Utrilla wrote those famous letters mentioned in the last chapter.

One afternoon as Saavedra came in, Julia happened to be passing through the vestibule; she affected to go in front of him without greeting him, but suddenly twitched the end of his cravat, and untied it.

"Hold on there, you little witch! Now come and tie it for me again!"

But Julia was already out of sight, laughing. Don Alfonso followed her; he overtook her in the dining-room; when the girl saw him, she started to run again, and went to the kitchen.

[1] *Bonita, graciosa, elegante, encantadora.*

"You won't escape me that way!" cried Saavedra.

"Yes I shall too," retorted the girl, again vanishing from sight.

Both ran along the corridor, but when they were near the parlor, Julia turned around, and going a few steps toward her cousin, said: —

"Don't chase me any more; I will tie the cravat, but I won't promise to do it well."

"It is enough if you do it; it is a punishment which I impose upon you."

Laughing, though her hands trembled a little, she arranged the tie.

"What is that you have hanging there?" she asked, bending her head so as to examine a trinket which her cousin wore on his watch-chain.

"A gold heart. . . . Just like mine!"

And as he said that he bent over and imprinted a kiss on the girl's neck.

Julia straightened herself up as though a pin had pricked her, flushed deeply, and giving him a severe look, said in a muffled voice: —

"I assure you that I do not wish you to do such a thing again!"

Saavedra looked at her with mischievous, mirth-provoking eyes, and not paying any attention to her anger, went on calmly talking to her. Julia, uncertain what course to take, replied gravely to his questions, and did not look at him. Finally his perfect calmness and confidence had their effect upon her, and in a little while she was as gay as ever.

Their relations continued on this friendly footing for a number of days, until suddenly Julia for some occult reason began to grow sober and melancholy. Some afternoons, instead of going to the parlor to talk with

the visitor, she left him alone with her mother; if she met him in the corridor, she would give him a serious and furtive glance, and let him pass without a word; sometimes when he addressed her, she would not answer, pretending not to hear him; at other times, if she happened to go into the library, and found him there reading a newspaper, she would turn back in all haste.

All these signs of disregard or resentment, strange as it may seem, had no effect whatever on Don Alfonso, who, as though not noticing them, continued to show her the same gallantry as before, even more pronounced if possible, and he did not in the least alter his habits, nor his hours of entering or leaving the house.

It must not be supposed that Julia was sad every day; there were some, when without the least apparent reason, she would appear extraordinarily gay, filling the whole house with her merry voice, rallying her mamma, her cousin, and every one who happened to be visiting them, and being far more audacious in her witticisms than usual. . . But in the midst of this obstreperous gayety, she would suddenly stop for several moments, with her eyes set and ecstatic, and then her face would take on a very strange expression of pain.

On these merry days she would treat her cousin with unaccustomed amiability as though she were anxious to compensate him for the petty disdain that she had shown him in the days gone by.

Don Alfonso stole three or four more kisses, each time receiving an energetic protest on the girl's part, and finally the formal threat of telling her mother. Nevertheless, these were not the days when she was sad and down-spirited.

One evening Julia, Miguel, Maximina, and Don Alfonso

formed a little group[1] in the *la brigadiera's* library. Julia was very happy. Suddenly Saavedra said: —

"See here, Julita, haven't you a sweetheart?"

The girl grew as red as a cherry; then pale. Miguel, seeing her embarrassment, and being absolutely at sea as to the reason for it, hastened to her aid, saying: —

"Julia has not as yet decided upon any man; her character is too fickle. . . ."

"What do you know about it!" interrupted the girl in a fury of passion, casting a look of hatred upon him.

"My dear girl, I thought. . . ."

"Please talk about what you know. You haven't the slightest idea what is going on in my mind," she rejoined, with a severe intonation; and turning to her cousin, and looking him straight in the face, she added: —

"And supposing I had, what of it?"

"Nothing," replied Don Alfonso, calmly. "How glad I should be if you had one worthy of you; but it seems to me that would not be very easy, considering what a nice girl you are, little coz!"

"Oh yes, I am an angel!" exclaimed the girl, in a sarcastic tone.

She remained a moment lost in thought, then, jumping up, left the room.

Miguel had been surprised by his sister's answer, not so much at the significance of her words as at the violent and scornful tone which till that time she had never used toward him. And stopping to think a moment, he was not slow to fathom what was passing through the girl's mind.

She came back again after a few moments, with smiling face, the same as before, and began to enliven the *tertulia* with her witticisms. She did not sit down, but kept

[1] *Tertulia.*

moving about the room with the lithe grace and liveliness characteristic of her.

Miguel noticed, however, that there was too much excitement underneath her gayety: she went rapidly from one subject to another; she asked questions and answered them herself, and laughed boisterously at the slightest excuse. She sat down at the piano and began to play very loud; then she sang a romanza from an opera, and this she suddenly changed into a Spanish song, which she did not finish either. Then she quitted the piano to frolic with Maximina, whom she obliged to dance a polka whether she would or no; presently she accosted her brother and kissed him again and again, saying to Maximina: —

"You aren't jealous, are you now?"

Don Alfonso's eyes followed her in all these evolutions keenly and persistently, with a peculiar expression of gentle irony. Miguel noticed it, and made a slight gesture of dissatisfaction.

In the following days Julia's avoidance of her cousin increased, and was shown in a very unpleasant manner. He had only to come where she was for her immediately to leave the room: if he asked her to sing, or play the piano, she would give him a flat refusal; she did not address a single word to him, and if he asked her a question she would answer curtly and without looking at him. *La brigadiera* noticed these shortcomings, and chided her severely, but without any effect. Don Alfonso pretended not to notice them, and continued imperturbably to treat her with his exquisite courtesy, and finding every opportunity to give her praise which, of course, she received with very bad grace.

One day at dinner time, while they were still at dessert, *la brigadiera* was conversing socially with her nephew. Julita preserved an obstinate silence, making little balls of bread and looking steadily at the table.

They were talking about a ball to be given by a certain duke, one of Saavedra's friends, where they were going to revive the ancient and classic minuet. In fact, they had been practising it several days, and Saavedra had ordered an elegant costume of doublet and hose, the details of which he was carefully describing to his aunt.

Julita looked up, and giving him a saucy glance, said with peculiar malice ill-concealed: —

"It seems like a falsehood for you to engage in such things."

"Why, little coz?" asked Don Alfonso, smiling amiably.

"Because you are already an old man," rejoined the girl, with a scornful accent. A moment of silence followed that impudent thrust. It was *la brigadiera* who broke it, and she was so furious that she could not complete her sentences: —

"You wicked girl! Insolent! Aren't you ashamed? How could you dare. . . . I feel as though I should sink through the floor! . . . (*standing up, in high dudgeon*). The idea! . . . Leave the room this very moment, you shameless creature!"

Don Alfonso, smiling with unchanged calmness, endeavored to pacify her, saying: —

"But what is the harm in her remark, señora? Julia has only told the truth. It is what I say to myself every morning when I brush my hair. . . . The worst of it is, that I am getting to be a boyish old man."

La brigadiera would not listen to him, but pointed her daughter to the door, with extended arm; Julia, bursting into tears, but still with haughty and lofty face, left the room.

Don Alfonso went on trying to calm his aunt, who not

having relieved her mind, as she usually did, in a more brutal fashion, in order to find compensation, heaped reproaches on her daughter. After she was somewhat relieved she got up and went to enjoy her *siesta* for a little while.

Her guest likewise arose, with his cigar in his mouth, and with slow, lazy steps went to the sewing-room, hoping to find his cousin there. He was not disappointed; she was there, reading a book, with her head resting on one hand, and the other hanging over the back of the chair.

Don Alfonso halted at the threshold, and gazed at her for a while with an indefinable smile playing over his lips.

Julia sat motionless, rigid; the frown on her brow grew a trifle deeper. Don Alfonso slowly approached her, and bending his head humbly, touched his lips to the girl's hand, at the same time saying:—

"Pardon!"

Julia gave a jump, knocking over the chair, and vanished like a vapor.

VII.

THE life of Rivera and his wife had gradually come into regular channels; the house was now entirely furnished. Miguel arose early and went to his library to work. Maximina stayed some time longer in her room, making up for the trials which she had been obliged to undergo both at the convent and at her aunt's house. Her constitution required much sleep, and she had never been able to satisfy this necessity. Once she had asked her aunt as a special favor:—

"Aunt, when will you let me sleep as long as I should like?"

"Some day, some day, I will let you."

But the day never came. She had been obliged to be up at half-past five in the winter, and at five in summer, and there was no help for it. Now that there was no one to torment her, since Miguel dressed as quietly as possible so as not to wake her, she was able to indulge in her slothfulness. When at last she got up she would go straight to the library, and always greet her husband with a timid—

"What will you say to me?"

"What am I going to say to you, *tonta?* It must have been terrible to get up so early! It is not yet quarter-past nine!"

Maximina, who had noticed in passing, that the clock said that it was almost ten, was delighted with her husband's equivocation, and would kiss him affectionately.

"Listen; you must call me to-morrow when you get up."

"All right, I will."

"On your word?"

"On my word of honor."

It is safe to say that Miguel did not fulfil this promise: he felt that it was too great a pity to do so.

During the first months of their married life they made various calls, and received an equal number; among others, one from the Galician señoritas whose acquaintance they had made on the train; and they showed Maximina a warm and boisterous affection, appropriate to such maidens. Everywhere the young wife left a charming impression by her simple and natural manners.

"What a good woman your wife must be!" said Miguel's friends, when they found him alone.

The young man would smile with ill-repressed pride, and exclaim: —

"She is just a mere child!"

But he would say to himself: —

"God gave me light."

Marriage had not caused him to lose any of his independence, nor any of those bachelor habits which are so hard to overcome at a certain age. Maximina never demanded, or even asked, any sacrifice of him. She felt herself absolutely happy to be the wife of the man whom she adored; and the daily and commonplace actions of life were to her a source of unspeakable delight.

When breakfast time came, she would lightly lift the latch of the library door, step noiselessly up to her husband, and say: —

"It is half-past twelve now."

While they were breakfasting, the conversation which they kept up was full of affectionate trifles; when their eyes met, they expressed mute caresses; and many times Miguel reached across the table to get his wife's hand and kiss it, much to the young woman's terror and apprehension; she would instantly snatch it away by main force, glancing at the door as though there were danger of some dragon making its appearance.

The dragon was Juana, who was likely to appear with the waiter in her hands.

After breakfast came the happiest hour of the day for Maximina: she would go with her husband to the library, and he, settling himself comfortably in an easy-chair, would take her on his knees, fold her to him, and whisper in her ears the sweetest things she ever heard. Sometimes it happened that he would fall into a doze, and Maximina would not lift a finger for fear of waking him; and even though her position were uncomfortable, she would endure it until Miguel opened his eyes.

"There now, I must be going!" he would say, getting up. "What! so soon?" she would exclaim sadly.

Miguel would fondle her, and smile, and take leave of her at the door. It seemed as though these leave-takings would never end.

"They might see us from the opposite side," Maximina would say, tearing herself out of his arms.

"But the door is closed!"

"That makes no difference; they might see us through the *ventanilla*.[1]"

Sometimes, as a little joke on his wife, he would start to go without saying good by; but as soon as she heard him raise the latch, she would drop whatever she was engaged in doing, whether in the dining-room, the kitchen, or in her own room, and fly to the door. When she did not hear the latch, he would do his best to make her hear it.

Maximina spent her afternoons with the servants. Besides Juana, they had hired two others, — a cook, and another maid, who had a better idea of laundry work than the maid from Pasajes.

When Miguel came in at dusk, and rang the bell, the young woman's heart would give a leap, and she herself would run to open the door for him. Sometimes she would let the maid open it; but then she would hide behind the door or in the next room. The maid's smiling face would betray the secret to the young man, that his wife was somewhere near, and he would say, sniffing in a comical way: —

"I smell Maximina here."

And then he would go straight to where she was hiding, and catch her by the arm.

"I don't see how you found me so quick," she would say, with simulated disappointment. At other times she would open the *ventanilla*, and ask: —

[1] All Madrid apartments have a small opening, called *ventanilla*, in the entrance door.

"What is it you want?"

"Does Don Miguel Rivera live here?" he would ask.

"Yes, señor; but he is not at home."

"Is the señora in?"

"The señora is in, but she cannot receive you."

"Tell her that there is a gentleman here who wants to give her a hug and a kiss."

They laughed and amused themselves with these trifles, and the young wife never thought of asking her husband to give her an account of his time. She would go with him to the library. Miguel would take a book and sit down, saying: —

"There now, leave me alone a few minutes; I want to read."

"You naughty, naughty boy!" she would retort with innocent vexation. "You are very naughty to send me away!"

Miguel would relent, and pull her back by the hand.

After dinner they used to spend another little while together, and then he would go to the café, and from there to his editorial rooms, returning at twelve or one. His wife used to try to wait for him, either by reading a book or by taking a nap. Saturdays they always went to the theatre, for *La Independencia* was not published on Sundays, and so there was one day in the seven when he was not driven with work.

One evening, as she was coming down stairs, Maximina, who was occupied in putting on her gloves, tripped and fell, rolling down several steps.

"Oh! my wife!" cried Miguel, hastening to her aid.

The young woman got up with a smile, though she was flushed with alarm. She had not suffered any harm, but the heart-rending cry uttered by Miguel had gone to the very depths of her soul.

Then, also for the first time, Miguel realized how this gentle creature had taken possession of his heart.

She had been greatly troubled at a slight ailment from which her husband suffered during the early months of their marriage: severe rheumatic pains kept him housed for several days; he grew pale and thin, and, worse than all, was in a very unhappy frame of mind, for he was not a man to endure adversities patiently.

Maximina was deeply troubled, and do the best she could, it was impossible for her to hide her grief. She sat all day long beside the bed, and did not take her eyes from her husband; from time to time, almost overcome with grief, and making great efforts to control herself, she would say: —

"You feel better, you *do* feel better, don't you? Yes, yes, you must feel better!"

"Since you say so, you must be very sure of it," he would say slyly, with an ironical smile.

And then seeing her great, timid, innocent eyes fill with tears, he would repent of his unseasonable words, and add, caressing her hand: —

"Don't mind about me. I am doing well. To-morrow I shall be all right; truly I shall."

And the young wife was happy for a few moments, until she would be alarmed again by some new complaint from the sick man.

How delightful when he got well again! It was the first time that her husband ever heard her sing at the top of her voice. She ran and jumped, jested with the maids, and was even quite successful in mimicking the Madrid accent which Juana had been recently acquiring. This sudden attack of obstreperous joy formed a lovely contrast with the usual seriousness of her character. Miguel, who knew the reason of it, looked at her with delight.

When he was entirely recovered, it was incumbent upon them to attend mass at San Sebastian. Maximina suggested it, and asked him with so much humility that he hadn't the heart to object.

The former *colegiala* of the convent of Vergara could not help mixing religion with all the acts of her life. Miguel, in spite of his own lack of faith, found his wife's piety so poetical, so innocent, that it never once passed through his mind to disaffect her of it. "If ever it became hypocritical, it would be quite another thing," he said to himself.

Consequently he was not at all averse to going with her every Sunday to mass; besides, Maximina for many months could not bring herself to set foot in the street alone.

After a while, however, the brigadier's son began to forget his duty, and under the pretext that San Sebastian was near at hand, he would stay at home Sunday mornings, while Maximina, with heroic courage, would assume the terrible risk of going to church all by herself.

Still she suffered greatly; she imagined that everybody despised her, that they were going to say impudent things to her; the unfriendly glances so much in fashion among the natives of Madrid filled her with terror; she could have wished to be invisible!

But she did not venture to tell her fears to Miguel, lest she should vex him, and cause him to go to mass with her against his inclinations.

One morning, a little while after she had started out for church, Miguel heard the bell ring violently; then the library door was flung open, and Maximina came in, pale as a sheet.

"What has happened?" he demanded, rising.

Maximina dropped into a chair, hid her face in her hands, and began to weep.

Miguel anxiously insisted: "Did you feel ill?"

The young wife made an affirmative gesture.

"How was it? Tell me."

"I don't know," she replied, in a weak and hesitating voice. "I had been in church but a few minutes. . . . I began to feel sick. Then the pictures of the saints began to waver before my eyes. . . . I felt as though my sight were leaving me. . . . And without knowing what I was doing I started to run. . . . And before I knew it I found myself near the grand altar. . . . I heard the people saying: 'What is it? what is it?' and that there was a confusion. . . . I turned around, and without looking at any one, I crossed the church again, and came out. . . ."

Miguel succeeded in calming her; he made the servant bring her a cup of lime juice, and promised that he would not let her go to church again alone.

After a while, when she was entirely recovered, he asked her a question in a whisper, which she, dropping her eyes, answered in the negative. Then with a smiling face he whispered a few words in her ear. . . . The young wife, when she heard them, trembled, fastened her eyes on him with an anxious expression for a moment, and, confused and blushing, threw herself into his arms, murmuring: —

"Oh, don't deceive me! Don't deceive me, for Heaven's sake!"

VIII.

From this day forth the serenity and sweetness which we have said was characteristic of Maximina's face began to gain a more concentrated, more delicate aspect, like the mystic expression of saints assured of heaven. She did not speak of the occurrence with her husband again,

and when he alluded to it, she dropped her smiling eyes, and her face flushed a little.

But Miguel understood perfectly that she was thinking of nothing else; that the bliss of coming maternity filled her whole nature, her life, and her being. He also was delighted, not so much at the new trust with which nature was going to honor him, as at the spectacle of his wife's happiness, and in secretly watching in her eyes, and in all her movements, the adorable mystery that was taking place in her soul.

When they walked along the street, he noticed that she cast quick and anxious glances at the linen shops, where baby-caps and children's wardrobes were on exhibition. And divining that she would enjoy stopping, he would make some excuse for asking the price of shirts or handkerchiefs, and let her amuse herself looking at infant wardrobes.

"Do you know," she would say afterwards, "do you know how much baby shirts cost a dozen?"

"No," he would answer, laughing.

"I do, though!"

One day, as he was passing by the chamber door into the library, he caught sight of her looking into the wardrobe mirror; and he was surprised, because no woman was ever freer from vanity and coquetry than she; but his surprise was changed into amusement when he saw that she was looking at her profile to see whether her form had changed. But lest he should embarrass her he went out on his tiptoes.

Another day, as they were walking in the neighborhood of the Retiro, they happened to see a white hearse in which was a child's coffin. Maximina looked at it with an expression of deep pain, and watched it until it disappeared from sight; then, with a gentle sigh, she exclaimed;—

"Oh, how sorry it makes me feel for children that die!"

Miguel smiled and made no reply, reading her thoughts.

While time glided away in this sweet and delightful manner for our young couple, Marroquín, the hairy Marroquín, was trying to accomplish his own ends; the nation was over a volcano, and the former professor of the Colegio de la Merced, secretly, and in company with our friend, Merelo y García, was not behindhand in stirring the flames of civil discord.

Not a night passed without both of them uttering bloody prognostications for the future in the Café de Levante; the number of times that institutions had been crumbled into dust on the marble tables was beyond belief; the waiters, from listening to democratic discourses, served the customers badly; more then once the secret police had visited the establishment, so said the disturbers of the public peace; but there had been no arrests, and this made Marroquín desperate. He enjoyed, beyond measure, speaking so as to be heard of all who came to the table, at the same time fastening his gaze on some peaceable customer, and making tremendous boasts, so as to rouse his curiosity.

"Don Servando," he would shout to a gentlemen sitting some distance from him, "do you expect to go out for a walk to-morrow?"

"Certainly, as always, Señor Marroquín."

"You had better not take your wife and children."

"Man alive! why not?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing! That is all I have to say."

But the revolutionary professor enjoyed most one evening when he succeeded in bringing to the café his old friend and colleague Don Leandro.

Don Leandro's name was still on the faculty of the Colegio de la Merced, which was no longer under the direc-

tion of the ex-captain of artillery, but of the chaplain Don Juan Vigil. Don Leandro was the only one of the old professors left, and this was because he was unhappy and patiently endured the caprices of the chaplain, who now more than ever took delight in tormenting him, and lavishing upon him the tremendous gifts of sarcasm wherewith he was endowed by nature.

Marroquín met him one Sunday in the street, and after a hearty greeting, as his custom was, he began to say harsh things of the curé, which was also a habit of his. This flattered the worthy Don Leandro immensely, though he affected not to listen to him, for he detested backbiting, and was greatly afraid of hell, though not so much of purgatory.

So that Marroquín, in spite of his depraved ideas, served as a powerful temptation for his friend to go into El Levante and have a glass of water, for example. Don Leandro, no matter what opprobriums the heretical professor heaped upon his born enemy, acquiesced with a smile; and even, from time to time, he himself would let slip some spiteful word, promising before the tribunal of his conscience to confess it immediately.

But the trouble was, Don Leandro's confessor was the very same chaplain, who, like his glorious predecessor, Gregory VII., aspired to possess the key to the consciences of his subjects, and would not hear to any alumnus or dependent of the college confiding his load of sins to any other bosom than his.

This, according to all logic, caused poor Don Leandro great tribulation, who, as he went often to confession, found himself obliged to tell the chaplain all the evil thoughts that he had about him; but the torment that the latter inflicted was much greater and more cruel. Oftentimes, while Don Leandro was unbosoming himself, the

confessor heaved deep sighs and made the confessional creak as though his chair pinched him.

He was tempted to dismiss him from the college, but he felt that such a thing would be an attack on the sacred character of the confessional, since Don Leandro did his duty conscientiously, and to turn him off required that he should make use of his knowledge acquired in the tribunal of penance.

Afterwards it occurred to him to send him to some one else to make his confession; but the demon of curiosity had firm possession of him, and, though every day he promised himself to give him notice, he never reached the point of doing so, and continued to hear his own deeds criticised without the power to defend himself.

"*Barájoles!* what a penance God has put upon me," he would say afterwards, as he strode up and down his room. "How I should like to give this idiot a couple of raps!"

Don Leandro, when he entered El Levante, had no idea that he was going to meet so many gentlemen, and still less that there were among them a number of impious revolutionists, enemies of "all religious restraint." Accordingly, when he began to hear them speak of the government in the terms which they were wont to use, he flushed deeply and began to cast surreptitious glances in all directions, and especially at Marroquín.

"See here, Señor Marroquín!" he said in an undertone, "let us talk about something else."

Marroquín, smiling in a superior manner, replied:—

"Don't have any fears, my friend Don Leandro; the police have come in here already several times; but they did not see fit to lay their hands on any one: if they should, the affair is now so well matured it would be the signal for the eruption to break out."

"What eruption?"

"The revolution, man alive!"

"*Santo Cristo!* Do you know, Señor Marroquín, these things are very serious, very serious! If you will not take it in bad part, I should like to be going. . . . Anyway, I have something that I must be doing. . . ."

Marroquín took him by the arm, and compelled him to sit down again.

"Don't you have any apprehension, my dear friend! Nothing can happen to you, at any rate, because you do not, like me, figure in all the lists which the police have been sending to the authorities."

"No matter; if it does not make any difference to you, we will change the subject."

The subject was changed, indeed, but the topic which followed was still more terrible and demoniacal.

They talked of nothing else than the queen, and any one can imagine what could have been said of that august lady, — that she was going to lose her crown and go into exile.

The moment the professor heard these atrocious remarks, he grew livid, and it was impossible to keep him longer; he left without saying good by, and directed his steps toward his college, which he reached in a breathless condition. . . .

The poor man had the innocence to relate this episode to the mayordomo, who lost no time in reporting it to the director.

Unlucky Don Leandro! For many days he had to endure the chaplain's grievous and coarse mockery. . . . What troubled him most was, that before the scholars he called him conspirator, in that sarcastic tone affected by the curé in such cases. At other times he nicknamed him the "Venetian conspirator," which made the boys laugh,

and as Don Leandro said, very truly, "The dignity of the professorship was undermined."

The labors of our friend Mendoza, otherwise Brutandor, in behalf of the revolutionary cause, were employed in a higher circle than those of Marroquín, Merelo, and the other small fry of the liberal school. He had disappeared for the time being, as we already know, and in Spain the fact of a person disappearing is something that gives infinite importance, and often imperishable glory. For, indeed, when a man disappears, the public rightly presume that it must be for working out in secret great and noteworthy undertakings. Those of Mendoza, although we know not what they were, must have been portentous, if what was said was true, since they obliged him to remain concealed in Madrid more than three months, changing his concealment and his disguise any number of times. Miguel had known something of his life and perils, but at last he lost track of him.

This was the state of affairs, when one evening, after dinner, while Rivera was sitting in the library with Maximina on his knee, there was a tremendous ring at the door-bell.

The young woman was on her feet in a second.

"Who can that be at this time o' day?" queried Miguel. "Has either of the girls gone out?"

"I think not."

Just then Juana came in.

"Señorito, it is a waiter from the café wants to speak with you."

"A waiter from the café? I don't remember that I have any account anywhere. . . . Tell him to come in."

"Wait! wait!" exclaimed Maximina; "let me get out by this door!"

And she ran out by the parlor door, as was always her custom, when any of Rivera's visitors came.

At that instant the waiter appeared, and Miguel could scarcely recognize under his disguise his friend Mendoza.

"Perico!"

"Shhhhhhhhh!" exclaimed Mendoza, putting on an expression of terrible fear.

And he hastened to bolt the door.

"What is up?" asked Miguel, affecting great anxiety.

Mendoza sat down, heaved a sigh, and answered frankly: —

"Nothing."

"I thought so."

Brutandor, without heeding the irony of those words, began to whisper, bringing his mouth close to his friend's ear: —

"I have been for the last fortnight at La Florida, hiding in the house of the laundrymen. . . ."

"Man! if I had known it, I should have made you a visit."

"Don't say anything about visits! They might follow you, and get their hands on me."

"And how have you enjoyed your visit in the country?"

"I had a pretty fair sort of time. There was only one bed in the house; in the night while the laundrymen were asleep, I would go out, and take a walk along the river bank, and at sunrise, when the men were up, I used to go to bed."

"How cool and delightful it must have been!"

"Well, sometimes it would nauseate me a little; do you wonder? The Countess de Rios used to send me my meals with great precautions, changing the servant every time. . . . But day before yesterday the laundryman did not sleep in the house, and this, as you can easily imagine, worried me. . . ."

"That's clear; when laundrymen don't sleep at home, it's a very bad sign."

"This morning I saw him with two bad-looking men . . . suspicious characters, and so, fearing that they might hand me over to the police, I decided to leave the place. The waiter in a wretched café there sold me this disguise, and after it got to be dark, I made my escape without saying a word. I thought of going to Las Ventas del Espíritu Santo, but the police keep track of all such places. Then a brilliant idea struck me, — that of coming to your house. How the deuce would they ever think of my being here! A lady-love of mine years ago used to hide her letters among her father's papers, and he would go hunting for them all over the house."

"So that you stole the idea from your sweetheart? You ought to be original even at the cost of arrest! . . . However, I am delighted that you came. I cannot help being flattered greatly to have in my house a conspirator of so much importance. . . . For you do not realize the prestige that you enjoy, nor what is said about you on this account. . . ."

"Really?" exclaimed Mendoza, flushing with pleasure.

"I assure you. You are called one of the heroes of the revolution. . . . But, my dear sir, what is worth much costs much; the greater the name you win among the revolutionists, the more exposed you will find yourself to whatever noose the government may tie for you. If they catch you now, I am inclined to think that you won't get off without being shot."

"Do you think so?" asked Brutandor, growing frightfully pale.

"I do, indeed. . . . But don't be alarmed; they won't think of coming here after you."

"See here, I beg of you, keep the servants from know-

ing anything about it, because you see some little word might get out through them . . . and I should be lost!"

"It is rather a hard matter to deceive them," replied Miguel, laughing at the tone in which his friend spoke those last words.

Mendoza took up his abode in the house; but first it was necessary to have a trunk brought from his lodging, and for him to change his clothes in Miguel's bedroom; when this was accomplished he went out cautiously, and soon returned like an ordinary visitor.

By these manœuvres he deceived himself, and was convinced that he had deceived the servants. . . .

Maximina did not fancy having the guest. She was so happy living alone with her husband! Nevertheless, with her usual docility to his wishes, she said not a word, nor showed in her face any sign of dissatisfaction.

While Miguel was away from home, Mendoza spent his time with her, but whole hours passed without their exchanging a dozen words. The young girl of Pasajes was not a very deep thinker. And Mendoza, as we know, was in the habit of keeping to himself the good things that came to his mind. Still she watched him closely out of the corner of her eyes, and afterwards gave her husband the benefit of her impressions. Though she tried to make the best of them, it was evident that they were not very flattering.

"It seems to me that Mendoza hasn't pleased you very well."

Maximina smiled, and said nothing.

"Well, he is an unfortunate."

"I imagine that he is not as fond of you as you are of him; that nothing in the world is quite as important as himself."

"Perhaps you are right, but it can't be denied that he is *simpático*. His egotism amuses me; it is like a child's."

Maximina, as her habit was, sat silently trying to evolve through her mental consciousness the meaning of *simpático*[1]*;* but her efforts remained unsuccessful.

Five days after his arrival, Mendoza received a letter from the Countess de Ríos, inclosing another from her husband. Both reached their destination by passing through various hands. The general said that the party who furnished the money for publishing *La Independencia* gave him to understand that he would not give another quarter unless he were guaranteed the thirty thousand duros which he had already spent. As he could not address himself to any of his friends, and judged that his wife was not a suitable person for the transaction, he charged him at all hazards to have an interview with the "white horse," and try to get a subscription that would be effective in pacifying him, because the paper had been a constant loss to them in these critical times.

Mendoza handed the letter to Rivera.

Although he had no connection with the financial administration of *La Independencia*, Rivera had for some time been conversant with the monetary difficulties with which the journal was struggling. After reading the letter carefully, he said, looking up: —

"Well, what now?"

"Well, as you can imagine, I cannot undertake this commission, because I do not go out of doors. . . ."

"And so you want me to fill the gap, do you?"

Mendoza was silent, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Well then, my friend," said the brigadier's son in a determined voice, "I am sorry to tell you that I will not undertake to ask money or guarantees of money from any one."

[1] A word similar in meaning to our "sympathetic," but not quite synonymous; more akin to "congenial."

Both were silent for some time after these words. At last Mendoza, without lifting his eyes from the floor, and evidently disturbed, began to speak: —

"I believe that if you were willing, the matter might be arranged without asking money of any one. . . . Eguiburu will be satisfied if only your name is endorsed, and he will furnish all that is necessary each month. . . ."

Miguel looked at him keenly, while the other stood still with downcast eyes; then he said, with a laugh: —

"You are indeed a man of happy ideas! If you die before I do, I shall be able to take your skull, and say more complimentary things than Hamlet said about Yorick's."

Then he suddenly grew serious, and began to pace up and down the room with the letter in his hands. After a while he stopped in front of his friend, who was still standing in the position of a whipped schoolboy, and said: —

"And who is going to guarantee *me* the general paying those thirty thousand duros?"

"The general is a man of honor."

"Eguiburu, as you well know, will not be satisfied with such money; he wants either gold or silver."

"Besides, the count has many wealthy friends; some of them, as you well know, are compromised in this movement, and if the whole debt of the paper were put upon any one of them it would be paid."

The matter was discussed for a long time between them; Miguel in his ordinary jesting tone, Mendoza with his imperturbable gravity, and showing no impatience, but holding firmly to his reasons.

Rivera was over-persuaded. He finally yielded, and consented to endorse the paper. Over and above his friend's entreaties there was the interest which he felt in

the success of the journal, and the affection which he felt for it; and these influenced him to take the step. On the other hand, although he jested at the general's honor, he did not doubt it, and was certain that he would not be "left on the bull's horns."

When, on the next day, he told Maximina what he had done, she said nothing, and went on working at the edging which she had in her hands.

"What do you think about it? Did I make a mistake?"

Maximina lifted her sweet, smiling eyes.

"Do you ask me? I know nothing of business. Besides, for me, whatever you do is always right."

Miguel kissed her, and was convinced—that he had committed a great piece of folly.

A few days later, when Mendoza and Miguel were alone in the library, the proscript told his friend a secret that filled him with astonishment.

"I have something to tell you, Miguel. . . ."

"What is it?"

"I am going to be married."

"How glad I am! Let us know who the unfortunate being is who has had such bad taste!"

"I am to marry Lucía Poblacion, General Bembo's widow."[1]

We ought to remark, if we have not already done so, that the gigantic Don Pablo had died seven months before in Porto Rico.

Miguel was dumfounded, and could not forbear a gesture of disgust. This man knew what sort of a woman *la generala* Bembo was; he was perfectly aware of the relations which he himself had maintained with her. And

[1] Lucía Poblacion, *la generala* of "Riverita," was the lady to whom Miguel, when a young man, had been quite too attentive.

he had the heart to make her his wife! For several minutes he remained without having a word to say, a thing that had not often happened to him in his life before; then he murmured: —

"Very good, very good, I congratulate you."

"As soon as her year of mourning is over, which will be within five months, we shall be married. She is a very agreeable woman. . . . Now that I have become intimately acquainted with her, I am persuaded that all the gossip about her is pure fiction; the poor lady is the victim of a few fools who, out of disappointed jealousy, have given her a bad name."

Miguel's eyes flashed angrily; he imagined that these words were directed against him, and he had a ferocious sarcasm on the tip of his tongue; but he succeeded in suppressing it, feeling that the situation in which his friend was putting himself was some excuse for him.

"And if you did not think so you would do very wrong to marry her. . . . I have heard it said that Lucía has a snug little fortune; is that so?" he added, allowing it to be clearly seen what were, in his opinion, the motives of such a marriage.

Mendoza, though rather obtuse, perceived it, and replied angrily: —

"I don't know, I'm sure. . . . I met Lucía at Borell's, and from the very first I was delighted with her. She is so refined and so full of noble sentiments. The poor woman was obliged to marry a man old enough to be her father; it would not have been strange if she had gone astray; nevertheless, she succeeded in preserving her . . . ."

"Don Pablo must have had a pretty good thing in America, besides a high rent for his house," said Miguel, not heeding Mendoza's boasts.

"La Señora de Borell can say that it was she who made this match. You can't imagine how much she loves Lucía, and what a high opinion she has of her."

"It is said that Don Pablo's fortune has been greatly diminished in these last few years; but as more came in from America than was spent in Spain there ought to be a good income, and half of it belongs to Lucía in her own right. On the other hand, her children are young, and the income of the whole estate must suffice for them for many years."

Miguel kept insisting on this point, as he saw that it annoyed his friend, and he wanted to retaliate on him for what he had said just before. He showed so much annoyance at this ill-assorted marriage, when in the evening he told Maximina about it, that she could not refrain from saying: —

"Why are you so put out about it? Even though Perico marries for money he is not the first one who ever did such a thing. The only thing that surprises me is, that this lady consents to marry seven months after her husband's death."

As Miguel could not well tell his wife the reasons why he was indignant, since he was trying to keep from her the knowledge of certain social evils, and on the other hand he was afraid that the jealousy which she had once shown at Pasajes might be renewed, he suddenly calmed down and turned it into a laugh.

Still he could not divest himself of the feeling of disgust which the news had caused. Hitherto he had forgiven all his friend's outbreaks of egotism, but what he was now going to do was too low for him to overlook it. And thus it was that he could not help feeling a secret relief when, owing to a certain event that followed, Mendoza decided to leave his house.

He was talking one day with one of the maids, and his solemnly benevolent face made it evident that he was not at all insensible to the girl's black and roguish eyes; and she, on her part, was not less attracted by the guest's healthy physique and fresh, ruddy face. While she was arranging his room and constantly turning round to reply to his remarks, he was sitting in an easy-chair with his feet stretched out and with a newspaper in his hand.

"How glad I should be, señorito, to have you gentlemen succeed!" said the girl, after a long interval of silence.

"Succeed in what, Plácida?"

"In getting control of the government . . . go along! . . . and rule."

"I don't concern myself with such things," rejoined Mendoza, becoming suddenly serious.

"Come, come, señorito," said the maid, "don't you suppose that we know all about it? Then why don't you ever go out-doors? You are afraid of the peelers[1]! . . . The devil take 'em! . . . Ever since one wanted to carry me off to the lockup for shaking a carpet, I can't bear to see them even in a picture."

"Who told you that I didn't go out of doors for fear of the peelers?" demanded Mendoza, growing pale.

"Why, the shopkeeper down stairs. He told Juana and I that we had a very important gentleman hiding in our house, but that it would not be much longer 'cause everything was all ready for the revolution. . . . Don't let it worry you, señorito," she added, noticing how pale Mendoza had become, "the shopkeeper won't say nothing 'cause he's more liberal than Riego. . . . He wouldn't, he wouldn't, for mighty little good it would do him to have a war!"

[1] *Guindillas*, red peppers.

Mendoza, by this time quite livid, leaped from his chair, and without replying, left the room, reeling, and hastened to Miguel's study.

"What's the matter?" asked Rivera, seeing his friend's excitement.

"Nothing," replied Mendoza, in a feeble voice, dropping into an easy-chair, and covering his face with his hands,—"only my head is not safe on my shoulders!"

"That's what I have always told you; it is quite too big!"

"Let up on your jokes, Miguel! The thing is very serious. It is already known that I am hiding here in this house, and when it is least expected they will come and take me."

"Who told you all that?"

"Plácida. . . . The shopkeeper down stairs knows all about it. Just imagine, who won't know it by this time! . . . . I cannot stay here another day; I must find another retreat. The best way would be to leave Madrid."

Under other circumstances Miguel would have dissuaded him from this resolve, because he was perfectly convinced that his friend was in no danger in one place any more than in another; but for the reasons above suggested he took pains not to hinder him.

After a little discussion it was decided that Mendoza should make his escape that very afternoon, because they were more watchful at night, and might get wind of him. His idea was to go to Las Ventas del Espíritu Santo disguised as a water-carrier, and from there, if there were danger, he would leave Madrid by the Northern Railway: Miguel agreed to get him a pass.

In fact, the water-carrier for the house sold him his suit, which was certainly not remarkably new or cleanly.

After spending an hour in making up his disguise, touching his cheeks with vermilion, dishevelling his hair, soiling his hands, etc., our revolutionist went to the library, with his cask on his shoulder, and stood before the looking-glass.

"I recognize myself!" he exclaimed, with such a look of anxiety that Miguel and Maximina laughed till their sides ached.

IX.

MIGUEL'S cousin Enrique had at last succeeded in embracing the divine phantasm of glory in pursuit of which so many men run in vain. It was in the plaza of Vallecas, on the day of Our Lady of Carmen. The entertainment[1] had been organized at Madrid for the purpose of aiding some unfortunates suffering from a flood in the province of Valencia, and as he was one of the amateurs who liked to take part in sports of this sort, he was gallantly invited to thrust the *banderillas* into the bull's shoulder — an honor which he declined.

The committee afterwards discovered the true inwardness of his not accepting, and after making certain calculations and combinations, they invited him once more to be the *estoqueador*,[2] and this time he did not hesitate to accept, seeing that his dignity was saved. It was less than a year since he had chosen the alternative.

And as we have already hinted, he had covered himself with glory, his rivals with envy, and the respectable family to which he belonged with honor, though its worthy head had a quite different idea of it.

After a battle he had the fortune to kill the bull with a

[1] *Novillada*, bull-driving.
[2] Bull-fighter who uses a long knife.

superb lunge at a half-run, wetting his fingers, and entering and leaving the ring without a stain.

There was a perfect delirium of clapping, of waving cigars and hats; all the bull-fighting amateurs vied with each other in embracing him; he was carried triumphantly to his carriage, and sent back victorious to Madrid: on the next day the newspapers, in their reviews of the entertainment, raised him "to the very horns of the moon." *El Tabano*, a most dignified paper, dedicated exclusively to the interests of bull-fighting, declared that he showed *blood* and *modesty;* and this eulogium, in spite of its brutality, for some reason or other made him stagger with delight.

He spent a feverish, wakeful night, though his soul was caressed by a thousand brilliant visions. When morning came, he gave himself up to cleaning his long knife, and while he was occupied in this most noble task, he had the ineffable satisfaction of receiving, on a silver salver from the committee, the ear of the bull which he had slain.

The servant, after receiving an unheard-of fee, told him, with his heart bowed low in admiration: —

"What immense pleasure, señorito! Tato was nothing to you!"

"Pish! You must not flatter, my dear; you must not flatter," replied Enrique, with affected modesty; "El Tato was a great bull-fighter!"

"But I tell you it is so, señorito! El Tato never came out of the ring with his cloak more unstained. You see I know what bulls is! Señor Paco (he is now in glory) has told me time and again, when he seen me with the horse in full gallop up to the very nose of the beast: 'Juanillo, my son, you've got the very blood of the bull-fighter. Dedicate yourself to the art which would be much more profitable to you than cleaning boots, and holding nags in

the plaza.' 'But,' says I, 'Señor Paco, suppose I have a lady who gives me a good brushing down every Sunday, when I put on the red jacket?' 'Give her a lot of soft soap, my boy; if you wants to git along well with women, you've got to give 'em soft soap every day of your life and every other day too!' And the old man was right! If I had followed his advice, I should have been a different person. . . . I was the gent as brought you the mule when you fell; didn't you see me?"

"Yes. . . . I don't recollect very clearly, but it seems to me that I saw you on the plaza."

"Come now, if it hadn't been for me putting myself right on the horns of the bull, Don Ricardito would have been hooked yesterday afternoon at the second baiting. . . . Bad beast that was! They'd once before baited him in the village, so the pastor told me. That one of yourn, señorito, was a very lively little bull, very brave, and at the same time very gamy. Your stabbin' of him was very unusual."

"Pish! Perfectly regular, perfectly regular. . . ."

"Magnificent, Don Enriquito! magnificent! Only it was a pity that you hurried the least leetle bit as you rode by him!"

"I hurried?" exclaimed Enrique, flushing. "Man alive! it seems to me you have about as good an idea of bull-fighting as the lining of my trousers! . . . Don't you dare to say that I hurried!"

His modesty, which was "only fastened with pins," was quickly lost. The servant, seeing the ill-effect of his criticism, was anxious to amend it.

"No; but certainly it was a superior skirmish; and it makes no difference whether it was done quick or slow."

"No matter at all; we have talked enough, and I don't care to hear any more such nonsense. . . ."

And Enrique opened the door to let him out, and slammed it behind him, muttering: —

"The devil take the stupid fellow! Ricardito must have given him that idea about hurrying. . . . That rascal had better be ashamed of himself, and not let Felipe Gomez hold his bull by the leg."

And fully persuaded that the stain on his rival's honor could not be wiped out by all the perfumes of Arabia, he remained tolerably calm. The reading of the journals, and the presence of the bloody ear, mute witness of his courage, finally restored him to complete tranquillity.

But one thing afterwards occurred to disturb his peace of mind, and that was the way of preserving his trophy. If it were left in its present state, it would soon become offensive. Should he put it in alcohol? Then the hair would come off, and it would be turned into a piece of ugly gristle. Should he have it mounted? He would have to go out and make inquiries. He made up his mind to go immediately after dinner to Severini, the great taxidermist of San Jeronimo Avenue.

At dinner the talk turned on the bull-fight. Don Bernardo had already been informed by the newspapers of his son's prowess; and though secretly, at the bottom of his heart, he was flattered by the applause that he had won, he did not fail to appear stern, and to chide him, although not as severely as sometimes.

"Come now, Enrique, let this be the last time that you make a public exhibition of yourself in this way. You know that I do not like to have a son of mine play the role of *torero*, even though he do it well."

Enrique understood well that his father was not really angry, and was assured of the truth of the old adage, "Success pardons all dubious steps."

He lighted his cigar, wrapped the bloody ear in a rag,

put it in his pocket, and went down into the street, directing his steps toward the Café Imperial, with the hope of there receiving fresh congratulations from his intelligent friends, and to spend the whole afternoon talking about the bull-fight of Valecas: on the way he intended to call at Severini's.

It was half-past three, and pretty hot. Our lieutenant (for he had been promoted) was walking along the Calle del Baño, dressed in the latest style, in Prince Albert coat tightly buttoned up, light pantaloons, patent leather boots, and a sombrero with a peaked crown.

It was his idea to dress himself so in place of his ordinary "b'hoy's" fighting garb, so as to give greater force and relief to his portentous sword-thrust of the day before. He walked slowly, with the assured and overweening gait of a man satisfied with himself, casting keen glances at those whom he passed, to see if they recognized him, and puffing forth great clouds of smoke. Never had he felt so happy in body and mind.

At the door of a "dairy" a young girl was seated with a book in her hands. Enrique, as he passed, glanced at her, and the philanthropic feelings which he felt toward every living thing caused him to pause a moment and gaze at her with smiling eyes. The girl looked up with her big black eyes, the expression of which was half proud and half mischievous, and after staring at him for some time, she again gave her attention to her book, showing marked indifference.

Enrique stepped up in front of her, and stopped, saying in mellifluous accents: —

"What are you reading, my beauty?"

The girl again raised her eyes, and after staring at him sharply, replied: —

"*The Lives of the Four Rascals.*"

And she dwelt long on the last word.

Enrique was a little confused, but he stood with the smile still on his lips. The girl again buried herself in her book. After a while she raised her head once more, and said vivaciously, in an ironical tone, in which her irritation was expressed: —

"Walk in, gent, walk in. . . ."

"A thousand thanks, sweetheart," replied Enrique, entering the shop, and standing just behind the girl.

She turned around to look at him, with a haughty gesture, and said very gravely: —

"Man, I like you for your cheek!"

"And I like you for your sprightliness."

"Indeed! Since when?"

"Since I saw you from the corner of the street."

"Ay, how kind of you! And you knew as much as that, and kept it to yourself!"

"Why, whom could I tell it to?"

"To your grandmother, my son."

"I haven't any; my grandmother died when I was a baby."

"What a monkey!"

"No; I used to be homelier than I am now."

"Didn't your papa have to teach you during vacation?"

"I don't remember. . . . Zounds! Do you consider me so ugly?"

"Why should I deceive you? . . . Ugly? why you are uglier than sin!"

"Manolita,"[1] cried the fruit-woman from across the way, "when did you get up your awnings?"

"Just this very moment. How do you like them?"

"And so your name is Manolita?" asked Enrique.

"No, siree; my name is Manuela."

[1] Little Manuela.

"How witty and how delicious you are!"

"When did you ever taste me?"

Manolita was a *chula* or "gal" in her behavior, in her gestures, in her dress, in the pronunciation of her words, and in all that she did; but she was a very charming *chula;* and that is no miracle, for there are girls like Alexandrine roses in these blessed streets of ours.

Her face was oval, rather pale; her eyes were black, with pink circles under them; her hair was also black, and she wore it in ringlets around the temples; her teeth were white and small, and set close together; her expression that mixture of grave and scornful which is natural to every *chula* who has not as yet "gone to the dogs."

"Why did you say that you were going to finish your walk this moment?"

Enrique had not said any such thing.

"Before going I wish you would give me a glass of milk."

Manolita got up solemnly from the chair, leaving her book in it, and went to the counter, and without saying a word filled a glass with milk, put it on a plate, and set it on one of the three or four marble tables that were there; then seeing that Enrique did not sit down, but stood motionless in the middle of the shop, following all her movements, she paused suddenly, and said in that ironical tone that never left her lips: —

"Don't you want to drink it indoors, mister[1]?"

"I would not drink it in the house if you should give me five duros!"

"Well, my boy, you can't have it out of doors! Come now, let us pour it back into the jug; only don't get sick and have to be sent to the hospital."

No sooner said than done; she started straight for the jug; but Enrique detained her.

[1] *Cabayero* for *caballero.*

"I did not mean that, my beauty. In the house there might some harm happen to me; but here! here I seem to be in glory merely looking at you!"

"Señorito, you need lime juice and not milk!"

"May be! . . . How much is this?" he added, after he had drunk up the milk, and looking at Manolita with a smile.

"Not quite an *onza*."[1]

"How much?"

"Half a real."

He took a few coins out of his pocket, and as he put them into the *chula's* hands, he suddenly felt himself attacked by a philanthropy that mounted toward enthusiasm for her. To manifest this feeling, so appropriate to the essence of human nature and the spirit and doctrine of Christianity which commands us to love our fellow-creatures, our lieutenant had nothing left to do except to give her a fond hug accompanied by a kiss fonder still. But before carrying out such a plausible scheme, he cast a cautious glance all around to assure himself that no one was coming to disturb this benevolent act, and previously he bristled up his mustaches as all good rat terriers are accustomed to do. When once he had thus completed his preparations — All ready! Go!

When the *chula* found herself in the lieutenant's arms, she turned around as quick as a flash, tore herself away, let fly her hand, and *zas!* gave him a tremendous slap right in the nose.

We know that of old Enrique's nose had a curious magnetic influence over blows, and attracted them as metallic needles attract electric sparks. Let us record this, so that no one may think it remarkable that the buffet struck that delicate organ instead of any other region of his face.

[1] *Onza de oro*, $16.

Two jets of blood instantly gushed from his sufficiently capacious nostrils, which was proof positive that Manolita's hands were not made of wax, though they were handsomely shaped. At the sight of blood her courage became even fiercer, like a lioness of the desert, and it was a narrow escape that she did not tear him in pieces with a tin dipper, for she clutched it in her fists, and held it over him a long time.

"Ay, how 'diculous! What has got into me? . . . What were you thinking about, you lisping idiot? . . . You made a mistake, señor. I'll smash in your great goat face if you don't get out of here quicker'n a wink! . . ."

Enrique was wiping his nose with his handkerchief, murmuring: —

"*Diablo! Diablo!* How you made it bleed!"

"I want to see you pack out of here, you rascal![1] you rrrascal! you rrrrrrrascal!" And each time that she repeated the word, she gave a more vigorous roll to the *r*, as though the preservation of her honor, endangered by the impudent lieutenant, depended on the proper pronunciation of this precious palatal.

"But first let me have a little water to wash my face. . . . I can't go out this way. . . ."

"You'd better have some green lemon juice. . . Clear out of here, you indecent wretch!"

The young woman stretched her right arm toward the door with so much dignity that it could not have been improved upon. Enrique, busy in cleaning off the blood and in looking with sorrow on the spots staining his handkerchief, could not appreciate the value of that haughty attitude which was worthy of Juno, Pallas, Cybele, or any other goddess of antiquity.

The mythological right hand, however, under the influ-

[1] *Seo morral; seo,* vulgar for señor.

ence of compassion, was gradually beginning to bend, and after a few moments it was the very one that brought from the back room a jug full of water, and set it down on the marble table beside the fatal tumbler of milk which the "rascal" had but just drained.

Still it must not be imagined that this act in the least infringed on the dignity with which the handsome *chula* had clothed herself: on the contrary, it made it more lustrous and illustrious. And while the lieutenant was washing his nose, carefully snuffing up the water, she, casting glances of Olympic scorn at his occiput and muttering threats, went and sat down once more at the door with her book in her hands.

The hemorrhage having been checked, after drying his face with his handkerchief the lieutenant left the shop; but as he passed by Manolita he had the impudence to say: —

"Good by, my beauty; I shall not lay it up against you."

It would be impossible for any one to conceive that Manolita lifted so much as her eyes, much more that she replied to him.

Enrique went to the Imperial with his nose rather red, possibly a little inflamed, but as happy as though nothing of the sort had occurred. The thought of the *chula* and the buffet that she had given him was driven out of his head by the congratulations of the bull-fighters and a dispute that lasted all the afternoon as to whether it is permissible or not for the *espada* to have a boy at the entrance to attract the attention of the bull when he charges at close quarters.

On the next day, however, when he left the house after breakfast, he remembered his adventure; instead of going up to town by the Prado, so as to take Prince Street, as his custom was, he entered the Calle del Baño the same

as on the day before. He had taken but a step or two before he could discern at a distance Manolita's checked chintz and blue kerchief.

The lieutenant smiled, calling to mind only the pleasant part of yesterday's episode; it was one of his peculiarities to see all the things of this world in the most hopeful aspect.

"Ah, there is my little *chula! caramba!* if she isn't witty and saucy!"

And with a honied smile on his lips, he walked leisurely to the "dairy," puffing out vast volumes of smoke, and carrying himself like a man whose happiness cannot be disturbed by a buffet more or less.

When he came near the young woman, he stopped just as on the day before. The *chula* looked up, and scanning him with angry eyes, said: —

"Have you come back for another?"

"If you are anxious to give me one. . . ."

Enrique's dog-like face expressed such pure satisfaction, and had grown so fearfully ugly in expressing it, that the *chula* could not prevent a smile breaking out on her face.

And bending over, so as not to compromise herself, she said: —

"Come, come, go your way."

"Don't be spiteful to me, Manolita, but forgive me!"

"That's a great note! I am not a priest to grant absolution!"

"But you can impose penance."

"No such thing! If I did, though, it would be with the dipper in such a way that you would not care to show your ugly phiz around here again."

"That could not be! I might lose my nose, but I could not lose my desire to see you; never!"

The *chula*, during this exchange of compliments, was becoming softened. Enrique, after respectfully asking permission, was allowed to enter the shop, and sit down to drink a tumbler of milk.

And in good fellowship and sociability, the lieutenant began to flirt with her in fine style, and the girl to answer him curtly, though she could not help feeling that it was rather good fun to be courted by a military gentleman.[1]

Enrique made himself liked by his frank and optimistic disposition. Manolita, finding him just as ugly as before, began to be attracted toward him.

"Why not tell the truth?" she said; "you are homely, but you have a *something* . . . come now! . . . peculiar."

"Yes, I know that," responded the lieutenant, gravely; "I am homely, but graceful."

"No, you aren't graceful either!" exclaimed the *chula*, laughing.

"Well, I am beginning to get into your good graces, if I am not graceful."

"That's so."

After they had got deeply interested in conversation, suddenly heavy and clattering steps were heard in the back shop, and a man, or, more accurately speaking, a one-eyed giant, appeared at the rear door in his shirt-sleeves, in gray woollen trousers, a red belt, and a flat Biscayan cap; his face was as ugly and frightful as that of his ancestors, the Cyclops.

After casting a grim look around the room, without seeing Enrique, or apparently not seeing him, he uttered several grunts, staggered toward the counter, and fixing his vitreous, angry eye on the polished silk hat which the lieutenant had laid on it, he picked it up gingerly in his monstrous hands, examined it curiously, like a naturalist

[1] Señorito de *bomba*.

who has just stumbled upon some new zoöphyte, while something that tried to be a smile, but succeeded in being only a horrible grimace, vexed his thick, livid lips.

"Oj, oj, oj. . . . Trrr, trrr, trr. . . . Is there a marquis in my shop? blast him!"

And he flung another glance around the room without having any objective point for it, as though there were no living beings in it.

Then, with perfect calmness and care, as though he were performing one of the most delicate operations of art, he crushed the hat between his hands until he had made it as flat as a pancake; and having done this, he flung it through the door into the middle of the street with no less delicacy and care.

Enrique suddenly grew as red as a pepper; then instantly turned pale; he leaped hastily from his seat like a new David, full of the impulse to meet the Goliath in battle; but Manolita restrained him, making no end of expressive signs going to show that the giant was not at heart a stern man. Then Enrique left the shop, a very disgusted man.

"Father, the hat belonged to this gent, and he was a customer."

"Hold your tongue, you! Do you understand?"

And in order to reinforce the significance of his wish, he gave the girl a slap.

But Enrique heard neither the daughter's amiable explanation nor the father's gentle reply; all he thought of was to straighten out and arrange his hat.

"Catch me coming to this pigsty of a shop again!" he exclaimed, furiously clapping his hat on his head, and sweeping like the north wind up the street in search of a hatter.

X.

In fact, he did not return . . . until the next day; but he went dressed *de corto*, that is to say, in short jacket, tight pantaloons, and sombrero.

"See here, señorito, are you going to the slaughter-house to skin something?" asked Manolita, as soon as she saw him in that rig.

And then began their skirmish of love-making; he making use of all the honied words at his command, she replying to each loving phrase with a proud, tierce parry.

Enrique was not foiled by that, and he was right. By the example of her young girl friends and companions, and by her rude training, the *chula* was armed with a tough bark full of thorns; but God knew well, and Enrique likewise knew, that at heart she was a poor girl, good, industrious, long-suffering, ignorant as a fish, and more innocent in certain respects than might have been supposed from her speech and behavior.

She had lost her mother about two years before; her sister had married a farmer, and lived out toward Las Vistillas. She herself lived with her father, who was a Vizcaïno,[1] who had been established in Madrid for many years in a little house with two rooms facing the corral where the cows were kept.

She was a genuine Madrileña to the extent of never having even set foot on a railway train, or having in her walks gone farther than Carabanchel.

The Vizcaïno, since the death of his wife, who had exercised a restraining influence upon him, had been taking more and more desperately to drinking habits, and treated his daughter very brutally. But even in her mother's

[1] A native of Biscay; a Basque.

lifetime she had become so accustomed to cruel treatment that it had never once occurred to her that she was living a very unhappy life; and when one day Enrique spoke of it in that way, after one of those barbarous deeds which the dairyman frequently committed, she looked at him in surprise and said, 'yes, that he was right, that she was very miserable'; but her tone seemed to say, "Man alive! don't you know that it isn't my fault?"

As day after day went by, Enrique, constantly visiting at the "dairy," enduring the *freshnesses*, the pushing, and occasionally even the slaps of this gentlest of *chulas*, when he went beyond the bounds of reason, spent his time very pleasantly in the toils of his love.

At first he had a few unpleasant encounters with the brute of a father; but afterwards they became great friends as soon as the dairyman discovered that the señorito knew a thing or two about bulls, that he had himself taken part in bull-fights, and was a great friend of the most famous *espadas*, to whom the plebeians of Madrid offer fervid worship.

When he came into the shop drunk, Enrique would take his hat and go, and the other was not in the least offended at him for it; in this way he avoided any collision with him. He spent not less than two hours every afternoon talking with Manolita; in the evening, after the shop was closed, he escorted her to the cafés to collect for the milk that they had used during the day; he would wait for her at the door while she settled her accounts with the proprietor.

As the *chula* had her suitors, and they belonged to the "common people," and were jealous of a señorito paying attentions to her, our lieutenant was sometimes threatened, and even attacked; but we know that in his character of *bulldog*, he was most fierce and obstinate; he

could defend himself so well with his iron cane, which he always took with him, that Manolita was perfectly tranquil about him, though she would bravely come to his aid and give his aggressors a few raps, as destructive as they were well directed.

What were Enrique's intentions when he first began this flirtation? They could not have been more perverse and insidious: he expected to ruin the *chula* and afterwards back out of it, but after he had known her a month Manolita had him a prisoner at her feet, as tame and obedient as a mountebank's dog, and this (let us say it to his credit, since we have said unkind things of him) because he had a noble heart and felt sorry for the poor girl's fate, so sorry, indeed, that he made up his mind to marry her.

He spent several days pondering over this resolution, and then took courage to open his heart to his mother.

Doña Martina was annoyed beyond measure, all the more from remembering her own former position as laundress; but as she was a woman of excessive meekness, and Enrique was like the apple of her eye, she quickly took his part, although she could not bring herself to speak to her husband about it, since she knew his temper, and was perfectly assured that he would tear things in pieces rather than consent to such a match.

Finally the lieutenant, not having the courage to speak to his father, determined to write to him, and leave the letter on his table.

Don Bernardo did not answer, nor did he show the slightest sign of having received it; after a few days Enrique left another on the same spot with the same result.

The only sign that he could see was in his father's face: generally clouded, it was now more gloomy than

ever. Then, after imploring his brothers, Vincente and Carlos to take his part, and after receiving from them a flat refusal, he went to ask a similar favor of his cousin Miguel, with whom he always kept on the most intimate terms of friendship.

"Fine recommendation mine would be!" replied Miguel. "If you want your father to kick you out of the house you could not find a better way."

"Don't you believe it; my father is fond of you — much more than he ever gives you reason to believe. That is the way with him . . . stern in appearance . . . but very affectionate at heart."

Miguel smiled, feeling respect for that judgment of a good son, and still he continued to decline the office; but Enrique insisted so strenuously, and with such fervent words, almost with tears in his eyes, that at last, though not with very good grace, Miguel consented to call upon his uncle and talk over the matter with him.

On the day set for the visit Enrique was waiting for him, walking up and down the corridor in a state of agitation easy to understand. When the door-bell rang he was the one that opened it.

"How pale you are, my friend!" exclaimed Miguel.

"My heart beats worse than if I were going to fight."

"Poor Enrique! Make up your mind that even if my meddling turns out ill, as I predict it will, you will not hesitate a moment to hang yourself on the beautiful tree that you have chosen!"

"See here, I can't wait for you in the house. My head is like a furnace; I must have some fresh air. . . . I will wait for you at the Imperial."

Before going to his uncle's room Miguel went straight to Vincente's, who was still master of ceremonies for the family.

Vincente received him with the affable gravity characteristic of him, and was amiable enough to give him a circumstantial and entertaining account of how the pipe that brought water to his wash-basin had, for a number of days, been afflicted with a small break, which had made it leak so that it had almost ruined a tapestry of the Catholic kings; but fortunately it had been discovered in time, and after a long search they had succeeded in finding the wretched leak.

Then he told him another story, no less interesting, about a curious system of bells which he had invented for communicating with the servants and the coachman. Finally, the oldest son of the Señores de Rivera, manifesting a generosity which was as honorable to him as to his cousin, brought from a closet a small ivory triptich, which he had recently bought at El Rastro. It was an exquisite work, a real jewel, as its owner declared, although somewhat the worse for wear. After both of them had looked at it and admired it, Vincente, as he was returning it to its place, and trying not to burst out laughing, said: —

"And do you know what Señor de Aguilar would be willing to give me for this triptich?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Just imagine, Miguel! . . . a Trajan! Think of it! he wanted to take me in with a Trajan."

And Vincente, unable longer to contain himself, laughed till the tears ran.

"How absurd!" exclaimed Miguel, laughing in sympathy, but not having a very clear idea of what a Trajan was, and still less its value compared with the triptich. The good humor into which this recollection put Vincente resulted in his being anxious to do everything to gratify his cousin.

"You want to speak with papa, do you? Now see here, he's engaged in going through his gymnastic exercises; but I'll take you to him, at all events."

"Gymnastic exercises?" exclaimed Miguel, in surprise.

"It was prescribed by the doctor because he had lost his appetite; do you see? He did not eat a mouthful, and even now he takes very little. He has been sallow and weak this two months, so that you would scarcely know him."

On entering his uncle's stern and gloomy room, Miguel was, indeed, surprised to see the change that had taken place in that excellent gentleman's physique; the strange garb that he wore contributed in no small degree to give him a sinister and terrible appearance: he wore nothing except a gauze shirt, through which could be seen his lean and bony frame; also full trousers of drilling, in which his shins could scarcely be made out. His face, always broad and lean, seemed more fleshless than ever; the yellowish complexion, the sad and glassy eyes, and, as his razor never ceased to perform its devastating work, his mustache had come to be only a slight speck beneath his nose.

His library had been turned into a gymnasium; there were parallel bars, a few pairs of dumb-bells on the floor, and a number of iron rings swinging from the ceiling.

When Miguel went in, his uncle was going through his evolutions on the parallels; he had the opportunity of watching him at his ease, and it pained him. Seeing the rapid and astonishing decline, he could not help saying to himself: —

"It must be that my uncle has some grievous sorrow."

And as the old gentleman, absorbed in his painful task

of walking on his hands over the bars, did not perceive his presence, he said aloud: —

"Good afternoon, uncle."

Don Bernardo dropped to the floor, and gazing with bleared, vacant eyes, replied: —

"*Holá!* What brings you here?"

"Go ahead, uncle; don't let me interrupt you. How do you find yourself?"

"So, so. And your wife?"

"She is very well; go on, go on!"

Don Bernardo gave a jump, and again perched on the parallels.

"You can tell me what you want; I am listening."

Miguel looked at him a moment, and perceiving that the best thing to do was to attack the business in hand directly, and without any beating about the bush, he began to say: —

"I have come to talk with you on a subject which probably will be irksome to you, . . . but I got myself into it with over-haste, and I have no way of retreat, but must fulfil it as well as I can. . . . Enrique has told me of his desire. . . ."

Don Bernardo dropped a second time.

"Not one word about Enrique," said he, stretching out his arm imperiously.

Miguel felt annoyed by such haughtiness, and said ironically: —

"What! have you decided to blot him out from the memory of men?"

Señor de Rivera gave him a cold and haughty stare, which Miguel returned with equal pride and coldness. The uncle mounted the parallels again, and feeling that he had acted rather discourteously, said with some difficulty, for his gymnastic effort took away his breath: —

"Enrique is a fool. After annoying me to death all his life with his follies he wants now to finish his career by bringing dishonor on his family."

"I have always understood that one who does some vile act dishonors his family. . . . But, however, since you do not wish to talk about Enrique, we will not. He is of age, and he will know what it becomes him to do."

He said these last words with the intention of preparing his uncle for what might take place.

Don Bernardo made no reply: he descended from the bars, and after getting his breath he mounted them again, and began to practise the "frog movement." As Miguel did not immediately take his departure, he renewed the conversation, saying:—

"It seems to me that you have grown rather thin since I saw you last, uncle."

"Yes!" replied Don Bernardo, pausing, and sitting astride of the wooden bars. "But you will see me much more so. There is a reason for it."

"Does your stomach trouble you?"

The *caballero* was for a moment motionless, with eyes fixed, and then said in a tone of deep melancholy:—

"I suffer in my mind."

And he took up his exercise with more violence than ever.

Never had Miguel heard from his uncle's lips any reference to his innermost feelings; in his eyes he had always been in this respect a man of iron. Thus when he heard that tender confession, it seemed to him as though he were in a dream.

And imagining that Enrique was the cause of his uncle's griefs, although the man had no reason to be grieved on account of his son, Miguel still pitied him sincerely.

"I see that Enrique, of whom I am so fond, is the cause of your troubles. . . . But you have two other sons, who must be the source of unalloyed satisfaction."

"No, Miguel, it is not Enrique. . . . Enrique has caused me some sorrow, . . . but what I feel now has its source far deeper."

Miguel began to puzzle over what he meant, and was inclined to imagine that it might be some loss or diminution of his property.

Don Bernardo dismounted, leaned against one of the bars to rest, and rubbed his sweaty forehead with his handkerchief, heaving a deep sigh; then he took some iron balls and began to open and shut his arms with the solemnity that accompanied all his acts.

After a few moments' silence, which his nephew dared not interrupt in spite of the curiosity that piqued him, the old gentleman dropped the weights, and approaching him with his eyes fixed and open like those of a spectre, he said in a hoarse tone: —

"Forty years ago I married. . . . Forty years have I been cherishing a viper in my bosom! At last its poison has made its way into my blood, and I shall perish of the wound!"

Miguel did not understand, nor did he wish to understand, those strange words. However, he said: —

"I have always supposed that you were happy in your marriage."

"I was, Miguel! I was because I had a bandage over my eyes. Would to God that it had never been taken off! . . . There is a day in my life, as you know well, when, in order to rescue the honor of our family, I descended to give my hand to a women of very different rank from mine. In return for this immense sacrifice, don't you think that this woman ought to kiss the very dust

on which I walk? . . . Now then, this woman is a Messalina!"

"Uncle!"

"More correctly an Agrippina."

"But after forty years, when my aunt Martina is already old and venerable!"

"That makes her crime all the more odious."

"Aren't you blinded, uncle?"

"It has cost me much to believe it; but I can no longer have any doubt."

"I regret your annoyance from the bottom of my heart; but allow me to doubt it absolutely. . . ."

"Do you know who the infamous wretch is who has dishonored my name," demanded Señor de Rivera, coming closer and speaking into Miguel's ear, — "This viper, also, I have warmed in my bosom!"

"Who?"

"Facundo! My fraternal friend, Facundo!"

"Señor Hojeda!"

"Not another word more!" exclaimed Don Bernardo, raising his arm majestically. "You are a member of my family; you are married, and I have told you my secret — to prepare your mind. A terrible catastrophe is threatening all our heads."

"But, uncle!"

"Not another word!"

Don Bernardo immediately grasped the rings, energetically raised his feet, and began to do "the siren."

Miguel left the library, convinced that if his uncle was not already crazy, he was in a fair way to go to the madhouse.

XI.

"FELLOW CITIZENS: the cry of liberty raised in Cadiz re-echoes all over the peninsula. Citizens, be proud! be proud of the name of liberals! The sun of liberty has at last pierced through the fogs of tyranny which have dimmed it for so many centuries, and it shines more gloriously bright than ever before, ready to blot out the miserable traces of a deadly and spurious brood. . . ."

These and other similar metaphors the hirsute Marroquín was shouting from one of the balconies of the editorial office of *La Independencia.* He was surrounded by about half a dozen red banners, and his face was distorted by emotion, and his hands were tremulous. At his side could be seen some of his comrades, all rather pale, though not as pale as he. Now and then the orator turned to them as though demanding their concurrence, and this was for the most part generously granted, all murmuring, in a low voice, at the end of each period, *bravo! bravo!* and other exclamations which imparted a new and powerful inspiration to the professor for continuing his harangue to the masses.

The masses, packed together in the Calle del Lobo, were listening with open mouths, and with their shouts and acclamations were likewise filling him with new spirit.

When at last all his astronomical metaphors were exhausted, and he had nothing more to say, he gathered all his forces and screamed in a stentorian voice:—

"Citizens! Long live liberty!"

"*Vivaaaaa!*"

"Long live the sovereign people!"

"*Vivaaaaa!*"

And now, having finished his discourse, he withdrew from the balcony.

A voice shouted from the street: —

"Down with property!"

"*Abajoooo!*"

The throng again started on its march, and in a short time Marroquín and all his comrades had joined it, raising aloft a tremendous blue standard on which could be read these words: —

"IMMEDIATE ABOLITION OF RELIGION AND THE CLERGY!"

All was tumult, noise, and gayety on that day, the thirtieth of September, in the capital of Spain. Brass bands marched through the street, playing patriotic airs; all the balconies (especial pains were taken that there should be no exceptions) were decked with variegated hangings; the church bells pealed forth a hypocritical jubilee; triumphal arches were built in all haste on the principal streets to receive the conquerors of Alcolea, the emigrés and martyrs of the revolution; numerous patriotic crowds rushed through the city, ready at any instant to listen to the words of all the orators, more or less improvised for the occasion.

The one which Marroquín had joined was not the least noisy and enthusiastic.

Miguel was informed of its exploits by his ancient professor, Don Juan Vigil, the chaplain of the Colegio de la Merced, whom he met a few days afterwards in the street.

"You have triumphed. *Barájoles!* God knows I am proud of you and other good friends whom I have had in the thick of the affair. The only thing that I regret is the excesses, don't you know? the excesses against our Holy Mother, the Church. . . . In front of the house

passed that hog of a Marroquín at the head of a regulat mob; I saw that you were not with him, and I congratulate you for not being mixed up with such rude people. . . . He had a card on which was printed, *Down with religion and the clergy!* He appeared in front of the college, and began to wave the flag, bellowing like a calf: 'Death to the priest! Down with the night-hawks!'"

"I was standing behind the blinds, and *barájoles!* I felt strongly like going down into the street and giving the hog a good basting!"

Miguel could not restrain a smile as he remembered the slaps which, in days gone by, the priest had given him, and, lest the reason for his smile should be misinterpreted, he hastened to say:—

"Don't you remember, Don Juan, the caning which you gave me one day for having shouted during recess time, *Viva Garibaldi?*"

"Certainly I remember. And you did not thank me for it, I wager?"

"Not at all."

"That is the way! Do your best to inculcate in your pupils sound ideas of religion and morals, direct their steps in the path of virtue, correct their faults with paternal hand, and then when they become men they do not even thank you for all your vigilance!"

"Let us not dispute about that, Don Juan; for that I thank you with all my heart; but the canings, paternal as they may seem, I shall never feel grateful for—not a shilling's worth!"

"That is all right; I won't say anything more about the matter; the greatest reward for my cares is to see you an earnest man, and well received in society. . . . But, by the way, you can't imagine the sensation that this devil of a Brutandor gave me the other day. I was

walking down the Calle de Alcalá, with the purpose of witnessing the entrance of the leaders of liberty (as you call them now). I was accompanied by the mayordomo and two pupils, when I saw in the procession, lounging in a barouche in which rode two generals in full uniform, my Brutandor, saluting the people as though he were an emperor! . . . *Ave María Purísima!* I said to myself, making the sign of the cross; I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes. Of course I knew that this clown mixed in politics, and that he had slobbered a few articles in the papers, although I always imagine that they are about as much his as the compositions that you used to write for him in school; but how could I ever imagine that I should be destined to behold him transformed into a person of importance, riding underneath the triumphal arches as though he had just been conquering the Gauls or overcoming the Scythians? And I declare the idiot was swelling up, swaying round in the barouche, as though he had ridden all his life in one!"

"You have always been unjust toward Mendoza, Don Juan. More portentous things than that remain to be seen."

"I believe you, even if you don't take your oath on it. If these are the men by whom you expect to regenerate the country, I have no doubt that I shall see him very soon made into mince-meat."

And cursing the glorious revolution, and scorning in the person of Brutandor the whole confraternity, he took a most friendly farewell of Rivera, for whom he had never ceased to feel a genuine fondness.

Little had Miguel cared for the revolutionary movement, although he figured as one of the most earnest adepts of democratic doctrines. The cultivation of his mind by an incessant devotion to the best reading, and his domestic

life, took too much of his attention for him to give to politics more than a very small part of his energies; the very journal, the management of which he had taken hold of with enthusiasm, began to bore him; the everlasting polemics, the disgusting phraseology of the leaders, soon wearied him, and he longed for the time to come when he could resign his position, and give himself altogether to more serious and useful labors.

He was happy in his home life, but not in the way that he had expected to be. For he had imagined before he was married that love and the joyful experiences which love would bring would be sufficient to fill his life absolutely and entirely, without leaving him time or desire for other things. And to discover that love occupied in his life a place apparently accessory or secondary, and that he was constantly occupied in other pursuits, some pertaining to his outward life, others to his studies and thoughts; that a slight disappointment would annoy him, and any inappropriate word vex him as much as before; that time and again he would return home from the café stirred up by some discussion, and his wife's caresses were not enough to calm him,—all this surprised him, and he was obliged to confess that domestic life had to take a place subordinate to other influences and pursuits.

Maximina herself had sometimes to suffer for the outside annoyances caused by others; when he was in an irritable frame of mind, it took a very slight annoyance to upset him; and although he was conscious of his unfairness, he nevertheless did not fail to speak his mind to his wife when the neatness of his room, or of his linen, or any trifling detail was not up to the mark.

To be sure, as soon as he saw her eyes fill with tears, he was sorry, and immediately gave her a loving embrace and many kisses. As for Maximina, as soon as she felt

her husband's lips on her face, all her griefs would fade away as if by magic; so that their quarrels — if such a name can be applied when one does the disputing and the other makes no reply — never lasted more than a few minutes.

In a word, as our hero suffered from the complaint, which among children is called *mimos*, or — what amounts to the same thing — as he was accustomed to see his wife constantly sweet-tempered, affectionate, and patient, it never once occurred to him that she could be anything else, and for that very reason he could not appreciate the value of that peace and home comfort which so many men seek in vain.

Maximina, on the other hand, enjoyed a happiness almost celestial. The presence of her husband, with whom she each day fell deeper in love, was sufficient to keep her in a state of felicity which shone in her eyes, and was manifested in all her words and movements. When he was in the house, she could scarcely take her eyes from him; she would follow him about wherever he went; she even liked to watch him when he was washing and dressing himself. Miguel used to make sport of her on account of this constant pursuit; occasionally when he was in bad humor he would say: —

"Come now, leave me, for I am going to get dressed."

And he would make believe shut the door; but she would respond with such beseeching eyes: —

"For Heaven's sake, don't drive me out of your room, Miguel," that he could not help smiling, and, taking her by the hand, he would put her down in a chair as though she were a child, saying: —

"Very well; but don't you move from there."

When he was away from home, he was never for a single instant absent from her thoughts; when she had to

talk with the maid-servants, she would always manage to refer to him directly or indirectly. If she gave orders to have the mirrors washed, it was so that *he* might not notice that they were soiled; if she consulted her cook-book, it was to learn how to make some dish that *he* liked; the clothes that she was mending were *his*, and *his* was the chain that she cleaned with powder, and the silk handkerchief which she sent her maid to wash, and the shirts which she sent out to be done up, because she did not feel that she was able to rival the laundryman, though her will was good.

The only little clouds that crossed the horizon of her happiness was her husband's unreasonable fretfulness, which seemed to increase. Sometimes she would say, with tears in her eyes: —

"I was worried about to-morrow, because for the last five days you have been scolding me!"

Miguel, grieved as always to see her weep, fondled her, and would return to his usual serenity and content.

Nevertheless, there was one cloud larger and blacker than the others, and the cause of it was the fact that on the second floor of the same house lived the widowed Countess de Losilla with her two daughters of twenty-three and twenty-four years old, six and seven years older respectively than Maximina. Cards, bows on the stairway, and smiles from the balcony brought about an exchange of calls, and finally there sprang up a very cordial friendship between the young ladies and the bride.

If not exactly pretty, they were rather handsome, to say the least: the older, Rosaura, a brunette with coarse features, and handsome though too prominent black eyes; the other daughter, Filomena, was very slender, and had a pale complexion, green eyes, a strange and mischievous look, and reddish gray hair. This young lady had a cer-

tain amount of forwardness unbecoming her sex and education, and this pleased the men even more than her figure.

Miguel enjoyed keeping up a glib conversation with her, and it amused him to see with what unrestraint and ease the girl slid over all obstacles, and what skill she displayed in making retorts, and giving her phrases the meaning that she desired.

And it must be said that when they came on dangerous ground they several times narrowly escaped a conversation of exceedingly questionable taste. When such a skirmish of wit began, Maximina used to walk up and down the balcony with Rosaura; although she smiled, it was evident that she did not approve. When she and her husband were alone afterwards, she said nothing about it, but the way in which she spoke of Filomena showed that she felt no great esteem for her.

"Well, in spite of her boldness and her masculine ways," Miguel used to say, "she is a nice girl . . . much better than her sister, according to my way of thinking."

Maximina said nothing, so as not to contradict him, but she had her own very decided opinion. A vague feeling of jealousy, for which she could not fully account, contributed toward making her feel an antipathy to her.

Thus matters stood, when, one morning Miguel, lying back in an easy-chair in his study, was tranquilly listening to Maximina, who, seated on a stool at his feet, and leaning her shoulder against his knees, was reading aloud from *Adventures of the Squire Marcos of Obregón*, written by Vicente Espinel. While the young wife was reading, he was playing with the braids of her hair, which she wore loose in the house for his special pleasure.

The reading could not have been much to Maximina's taste, judging by the careless and inattentive way in which she modulated her voice.

The novels which she liked were not those where everything that takes place is commonplace and prosaic, but another sort, the plot and extraordinary action of which piqued her curiosity.

Thus almost all the books brought by her husband for her to read made her tired and sleepy, and it surprised her that he praised these, and called those that she liked pestiferous.

She had just finished reading one chapter, terribly heavy for her, when suddenly, turning her head around and giving him a look which was half innocent and half mischievous, she asked: —

"Do you like this?"

"Very much indeed."

"I thought so; when a book does not please me nowadays, I always say to myself: 'How fine it must be!'"

She said these words with such ingenuousness and such a graceful resignation that her husband, laughing heartily, took her head between his hands and kissed her enthusiastically.

The young wife, encouraged by this caress, joyfully began to read another chapter.

She must have been about half through it, when she suddenly paused and uttered a slight *ay!* in such a peculiar intonation that Miguel was surprised; he started up and could see that his wife's face was flushed and full of an almost mystic joy.

"What is the matter?"

"I just felt . . . as though something . . ."

"What was it?" he asked, although he knew perfectly well what it was.

"As if a little, wee foot gently touched me."

"That is nothing strange."

Maximina did not care to read more; she laid the book

on a chair and knelt down in front of her husband: they began to talk eagerly about their child.

"See here! how do you know that it is going to be a boy, and not a girl?"

"Because I want it to be a boy."

"But now *I* want it to be a girl, and like you. . . . But do me the favor to get up, because, if any servant should come in and surprise you in this attitude, it would be very ridiculous. . . ."

"No, no; I don't want . . ."

At that moment steps were heard at the door, as Miguel had feared, and a voice, that was not a servant's, called out: —

"Can I come in?"

Maximina was on her feet in a flash.

"Walk right in!"

Filomena entered in her morning gown, with her hair in studied disarray, and her body *submerged*, if such an expression be permitted, in a magnificent blue silk morning gown trimmed with white lace.

Miguel had never been able to persuade his wife to dress in such an elegant and sumptuous fashion at home; the poor child did not enjoy putting on dresses that were for ornament rather than use, because, as she said, it made her feel bad to wear a new suit merely to go in and out of the kitchen.

"I am afraid that I am disturbing you," said the young lady, casting a malicious glance at Maximina's confused and blushing face.

"No, no; not at all," she replied, growing still more confused.

"One has to act with great circumspection toward newly married people. . . . But then, you are not among the softest. I came in without ringing, because the ser-

vants had left the door open. But if I am disturbing you I will go. . . . I have known the eleventh commandment this long time."

That light and slightly insolent tone amazed and wounded the little provincial girl more and more each day.

"On the contrary, at that very moment, we were talking about you," said Miguel, in the same light and jesting tone, perfectly intended to convey the idea that he was prevaricating.

"Man alive! what are you telling me?" she rejoined, ironically. "Well, I have come," she added, sitting down in an easy-chair and crossing her legs, "to ask you if you will let Maximina go with us to the opening of the Royal; we have a box . . ."

Maximina gave him a look, signifying that he should say *no;* but either because he lacked the wish or the courage, he replied: —

"A thousand thanks. . . . There she is."

Filomena looked at Maximina, and she, not having the strength to refuse or to make an excuse, made an ambiguous gesture, which the countess' daughter interpreted as an acceptance.

"Very good; at eight sharp we will call for her. You can come to our box, also, if you like; or, perhaps you may like to improve the opportunity for a little dissipation."

"Filomena! for shame!"

"Yes, yes; how virtuous you are! Any one who trusts in you must be fresh!"

And jumping up, she began to play with the paper-cutter, the paper-weight, and all the objects that lay on the table, among others a box of cigars.

"To see what cigars you smoke! . . . Man! what little bits of ones! what cunning ones! Are they mild?"

"Rather."

"Come now, I should like to try 'em."

And without any hesitation she took a "puro," and bit off the end. Miguel laughed, and handed her a lighted match.

"I have a very clear head," she replied, giving a bold stare at Maximina.

But after four puffs she threw away the cigar, saying:—

"Horrors! What detestable cigars you smoke! They taste as if they were from Córdova!"

"You little hypocrite! It makes you squeamish!"

Filomena shrugged her shoulders, and began to run over the books in his library, naming them aloud:—

"*Works of Molière.* . . . *Descartes; Discourse concerning Method.* . . . Method of what? . . . *Gil Blas de Santillana!* Ouf! how dull that book is! I could not get half through it. Haven't you any of Octave Fueillet's novels? No? Then you show very poor taste. . . . *Plato: Dialogues. Goethe: Faust.* I should like to take this book, Miguel, because I only know the opera, and I am very much interested in the argument. . . . *Stuart Mill: Logic.* . . . *Saint Thomas: Theodicea. Lope de Vega: Comédias.* . . . *Balzac: Physiology of Marriage.* . . . I have read that book; it has some very delicate and true observations. . . . Haven't you read it, Maximina?"

Maximina was dumfounded.

"That is one of the books that Miguel has forbidden me to read."

Filomena fixed her eyes on him, and smiled in a peculiar way, as though to say, "I understand you."

Then suddenly, with the vivacity and ease which marked all her movements, she left the bookcase, opened the par-

lor door, and went in. Maximina and Miguel followed her. She sat down at the piano and began to give a powerful rendering of a polka. Before she had played it through she jumped up, and went to the *entredós*, where there were two great pots of flowers, and buried her face in them again and again, breathing in the fragrance with ecstacy.

"Oh, what lovely flowers! Did you buy them?"

"No; my sister-in-law Julia sent them to me."

"I am going to give you a slip," said Miguel.

"No; it is a shame to mutilate a growing plant."

"It won't mutilate it. I am going to make you a little bouquet. Maximina, bring me some thread and a pair of scissors."

The young wife went for what he wanted, and handed them to him gravely, without saying a word. Then she went and sat down on the sofa, and from there watched the arrangement of the bouquet.

While this was proceeding, Miguel and Filomena kept up a constant warfare of repartees, in which the young lady showed sovereign freedom, and he very little respect for her.

Maximina listened to what they said, perhaps without understanding a word; but the expression of her sweet eyes kept growing more and more grave and thoughtful.

Finally Miguel handed the young lady the bouquet, with a gallant smile. She accepted it with a smile of thanks.

"For this gallant action I forgive you for all the saucy things that you have said to me. *Caramba!* it is already eleven o'clock!" said she, consulting the clock that stood in front of the mirror, "and mamma told me to make haste! *Adiós*, Miguel! see you later, Maximina!"

And she flew from the room like a rocket, and opened and shut the outer door herself. The keen and somewhat

mocking glance which she gave Maximina as she went out showed that she had an inkling of what was passing through her mind at that moment.

The young wife started to rise; but when she saw how swiftly Filomena was taking her departure, she sat down again, and remained there with her arms by her side, her head bent over, and her eyes on the floor. Miguel was looking at her out of the corner of his eyes, and understanding perfectly what that attitude signified: he hesitated for several minutes before he threw his arm around her.

"What is the matter?" he asked, drawing nearer and sitting down by her side.

"Nothing," she replied, lightly lifting upon him her sweet eyes dimmed with tears.

"Oh, what a little goose! Jealous of that impudent creature!"

"No, no! I am not jealous," rejoined the girl, forcing herself to smile. "Only I somehow felt a pain without knowing why. . . . I was so happy till a moment ago!"

"And you are now just the same as you were, sweetheart!" he said, embracing her. "Isn't it true that you are? . . . Tell me yes! . . . A few jokes with that shameless girl — are they sufficient to destroy all your happiness? That isn't common sense. . . ."

It needed a few more words to banish his wife's painful impression; and then, wiping her eyes, she exclaimed with a trembling voice torn from her very heart: —

"If you knew, Miguel, how I loved you!"

After their reconcilation they went out of the parlor with their arms about each other.

XII.

Julita often visited her brother and sister, but her presence was not as pleasant for them as it used to be. The young girl's character had notably changed during the last few weeks; she rarely gave way to that hearty and contagious laugh which used to fascinate all who heard it; nor did her conversation any longer sparkle with the piquante and ready wit which formerly entranced every one. She had grown more reserved and thoughtful; the smile that from time to time hovered over her lips was melancholy; she had become irritable and peevish; in the course of a few days she had three quarrels with her brother on the most trifling subjects: such a thing in days gone by had rarely happened.

"What a pity, Julita!" exclaimed Miguel at the close of one of them. "You are following in mamma's footsteps."

Her physical appearance had also undergone some change, and not for the better; the roses of her cheeks had paled a little; there were blue circles under her eyes; and though this made them more lustrous, it took away in large measure that sweet and picturesque expression that was characteristic of them.

Miguel and Maximina noticed these things, and had many times commented on them with sorrow; but there was one thing that attracted their attention above all and was the subject of long discussion between them: this was the invincible antipathy which Julia showed to her cousin Don Alfonso, and the eagerness with which she tried to bring him into the conversation, so as to blacken his character.

There seemed to be no defect which the Andalusian

gentleman did not possess in his cousin's eyes, and she took a malicious delight in enumerating and exaggerating them. In this respect, she every day made some new discovery which she was sure to bring to her brother and sister.

At one time it was that he had brought a great lot of neckties, which to her mind proved that he squandered his money; then, again, she made all manner of ridicule of him, on account of the perfect battery of perfumes which he had on his toilet table; at times she called him lazy, because he never opened a book; at others, she ridiculed him for curling his mustache with the tongs; then she would complain of him because he would not take her to walk. But what made her most indignant and beside herself was his habit of not going to bed till two or three or even four o'clock in the morning, and because two or three times he had not done so till daylight.

"What does this man do after he leaves the theatre? Where does he go? The best way would be not to think about it. He is every way disgusting, repugnant!"

"It is too bad!" Miguel rejoined. "But there is no reason for you to be so exercised about it. Mamma invited him to spend a while at her house. When she does not receive him any longer, it will be all over."

Julia made no reply to this; but the next day she was again going assiduously out of her way to get her cousin "on the carpet," or, more accurately speaking, in the pillory.

"Do you know it seems to me that Julia is in love with Alfonso?" said Maximina to her husband, one night as they were going to bed.

"It seems to me so too," replied Miguel, with a deep frown; "and I am sorry for it, because Saavedra is a

heartless, bad man, who would not marry her, and if he did marry her, would make her wretched. . . . And the worst of it is," he added after a pause, "mamma is as much in love with him as she is! Yesterday I tried to give her a hint about the impropriety of keeping him so long at her house, and she gave me one of her violent, impertinent replies, so that I have no more desire to touch on that subject, and yet I feel that it is very necessary."

There was a moment of silence, and Maximina exclaimed: —

"Poor Julia!"

"Yes, poor Julia! God grant that you may have no more reason to say that than now!"

During the two months that Don Alfonso spent in Madrid he amused himself to the utmost of his ability; his name, his figure, his money, and his notoriety as a fighter, which was in curious contrast to his smooth and peaceable character, gave him entrance into the most select society; he immediately became intimate with the most fashionable young ladies, and the houses where he called were the most aristocratic in the court circles.

When he was at his aunt's, instead of making parade of this, he never said where he was going nor where he had been, nor did he ever mention any episode that would betray it. On the contrary, he took particular pains to avoid speaking of high society, in which they did not move, so as to spare them the petty mortification which for some women is apt to be really painful.

He was the same extremely respectful gentleman toward his aunt, affable and gallant toward his cousin, although in all that he did he managed to show a peculiar haughty coolness, which is the quality best adapted for assuring success with the ladies.

One evening Julia, on entering the theatre, saw her

cousin in the box of a duchess famous at that time for her beauty, her discretion, as well as her conquests.

The position which the two occupied, in the rear of the box, and bending toward each other until their cheeks almost touched, the insinuating smile on his face, and the flattered vanity which was expressed in hers, all made on the young girl such an impression that, for the moment, she was afraid of falling, and it was by mere force of will that she managed to reach their seats. When she had recovered from that painful surprise, she said to herself: "But what folly! Why should I feel such an impression if I have absolutely nothing in common with him? And even if he were my fiancé, what would there be peculiar in his talking with that lady?"

At that moment Saavedra gracefully waved them a salute with his hand. Julia replied with a forced smile.

The duchess turned around to see whom her friend was saluting, and levelled her opera-glass in a most impertinent fashion. Julia, being conscious of the stare, became so serious that it was pitiful to see her. And from the corner of her eye she noticed that the duchess, laying down her glass, bent toward her cousin and said a few words, to which he replied, looking toward her again. Then the lady said something more with a half-jesting smile, which caused Saavedra to reply with a cold smile and a gesture of displeasure.

"That woman has just been saying something about me," thought Julita; and she trembled to see Don Alfonso's gesture. A hot gust of anger flared up into her face, and giving them a proud and scornful glance, she murmured: "Say whatever you please; you will see how much I care for you!"

And during the whole evening she did not once again even accidentally direct her eyes toward the box.

Between the second and third acts Saavedra came to speak with them, and sat down behind them in an empty seat. A pale young man with spectacles came along to do the same, and sat down in another seat. Julia introduced them with perfect composure: —

"My cousin Alfonso Saavedra . . . Señor Hernández del Pulgar."

Then she showed herself unusually jolly and gracious. The conversation turned on the drama of the evening, which was more terrible and melancholy than usual with the romantic school. Julita, with no little cruelty, parodied the most touching scenes.

"That man makes me nervous who gets angry and is always in a fury and always saying that he is going to fight. I wish he would hurry up about it, and leave us in peace; ay! how stupid! I don't envy that pedantic, detestable young lady her lover! The only thing enviable about her is her facility in fainting away. Tell me, Hernández, what is the name of that señor who is so furious and 'hopelessly given to Barabbas'?"

"Don Marcellino. . . . What I don't understand is this: why does Mercedes dismiss Fernando as soon as her father dies?"

"Man alive! because the tender sweetheart does not wear full mourning. And what is the young lady going to do without father or mother or watch-dog? Die? I should like to see it! . . . Tell me; wasn't it very improper for Doña Elvira and Don Marcellino to be alone together so long?"

The young men laughed, and exchanged significant glances.

"Girl! what nonsense are you stringing together now?" exclaimed the *la brigadiera*, sharply.

Julita blushed, perceiving that she had gone too far; but

still she did not cease to be gay and talkative, though it was so manifestly put on that it escaped neither Don Alfonso nor her mother. Hernández del Pulgar left, perfectly carried away by her amiability and wit.

In the third act Saavedra returned to his place beside the duchess, without Julita appearing to notice it at all. When they left the theatre, it was raining, and Don Alfonso went down and put them into a cab.

When he reached home half an hour later, he found Julia taking a cup of lime juice in the dining-room.

As their eyes met, Don Alfonso smiled not very openly. Julita had a very high color. Don Alfonso's smile seemed to say: "I know why you are drinking that *tila.*"

Julita's blushes proclaimed in a loud voice: "You have caught me in the very act!"

At the beginning of summer Saavedra determined to go and make his mother a visit before returning to Paris. Julia heard the news with indifference; she even started to sing some Malaga songs at the piano, leaving her mother and cousin to talk about the journey.

La brigadiera begged him to stay a few days longer; Don Alfonso refused gently but obstinately, declaring that he had given his mother notice, and had named the day on which he should reach Seville.

La brigadiera urged him persistently, like a woman accustomed to have her own way, and Don Alfonso resisted no less persistently, like a man whose determinations, though expressed politely, are irrevocably fixed.

Julia suddenly stopped singing, and half turning round, said, in a dry and impatient tone: —

"Mamma, you are annoying him; do cease!"

"I am not going for my own pleasure, Julia," returned Don Alfonso, blandly; "you know too well that nowhere in the world am I more contented than I am here, and

that I am perfectly satisfied to be with Aunt Angela and you; but I have duties toward my mother that I must fulfil, and I am obliged to be in Seville."

Julia listened to these words with her back turned, and once more began to play and sing, without making any reply.

The day set by Don Alfonso for his departure was a Wednesday; the two or three days preceding, Julia had been smiling and indifferent as before; but the circle under her eyes was darker and wider, and from time to time she would remain looking into vacancy.

Saavedra had determined to start in the morning, on an early train, with the idea of spending the day at Aranjuez with a friend who had a country place there.

He therefore arose very early, and after dressing he gave the last touches to his packing. His aunt also arose early, to see him off, and get him something to eat besides.

But Julia paid no heed, and remained shut in her room, much to the annoyance of *la brigadiera*, who had called her to say good by to their guest.

Taking advantage of a moment when she was busy in the dining-room, Saavedra slipped off to his cousin's room, gently raised the latch, and opened the door.

Julia was in bed; her eyes flashed angrily on the intruder.

"What have you come for?" she demanded, frowning severely. "Go away, go away immediately! This is a most atrocious thing to do!"

But Don Alfonso, not heeding her protest, calmly walked into the room, and said in a humble voice:—

"I have come to say *adiós*, cousin."

"*Adiós!*" exclaimed the girl dryly, and dropping her eyes upon the bed-spread.

Don Alfonso came to her, and audaciously taking her face between his hands and imprinting a kiss upon it, he said at the same time: —

"In spite of all this disdain and severity, I know well that you love me. . . ."

The girl, confused and enraged by his impudence and what he said, exclaimed: —

"No, no! I do not love you! You lie! . . . Go this instant!"

"You love me, and I love you," replied Don Alfonso, smoothing her face with perfect unconcern.

"Fool! dunce! impudent!" cried the girl, with more and more anger, "I do not love you; but if I did, this would be enough to make me hate you! Go!"

"I am not a dunce and I am not impudent. I confess humbly that I would die for you!"

"Die whenever you please, but go! Go this instant, or I will scream!"

"Don't trouble yourself any more; I am going," said he, with a smile: "I am going; but I leave my heart here. I will write you as soon as I reach Seville."

He left the room and shut the door; he remained a moment motionless, and then opened it again softly to look in. Julia had turned over and was sobbing, with her face hidden under the sheets.

XIII.

In point of fact, all the while that he was in Seville, he did not take pains to write her once, possibly because other beauties and other amusements used up his time; perhaps through calculation, perhaps for both reasons.

On the other hand, he frequently sent very tender

epistles to his aunt, and never failed to express his regards for Julia.

These little lines of remembrance exasperated the girl beyond measure, and she used to hasten to her room as soon as she saw her mother with a letter in her hands, so as to escape the infliction.

The month of July came; *la brigadiera* wrote to Seville announcing her departure for Santander,[1] in whose "Astillero" she rented a cottage for the two hottest months of the summer.

Saavedra replied, saying that he was going to Biarritz, and from there to Paris; he hoped that they would have a very pleasant time, and that Julia would enjoy it much.

Now it came to pass that one August afternoon as she was riding in the Alameda with a family which, like themselves, lived at the Astillero (her mother had not gone into town because she had an attack of neuralgic headache), Julia suddenly caught sight of her cousin in company with some young men. She grew terribly pale, and instantly blushed redder than a cherry. It was impossible for her nervous and ardent nature to control even the slightest impressions, still less those that touched her heart to the quick. She turned her head to avoid bowing to him, although she saw that he started to come toward her; at the next turn she did the same, and so for three or four times, putting on such a grave and frowning face that any one would willingly have foregone the pleasure of meeting her.

Even while she was acting in this way, her conscience told her that her conduct was very rude and strange, and after her emotion had grown a little calmer, she could

[1] *Santander*, known to the sailors as St. Andrew's, is a seaport on the Bay of Biscay; *astillero* means, originally, a shipyard.

not help saying to herself, "What a piece of folly I have just committed!"

And the next time, she faced Saavedra at a distance and bowed to him very courteously, though with marked affectation; then she grew serious again.

Either at her desire, because she was not enjoying her ride, or at the suggestion of her friends, they went home early.

Don Alfonso, who was on the lookout, noticed that they were going, and after a while he took leave of his friends and went to the wharf, where he hired a boat to take him across to the Astillero.

He reached there just at night-fall; after dismissing the oarsmen, he slowly climbed the shady hill, not caring to make inquiries of any one as to the situation of his aunt's cottage, and hoping that his good fortune would come to his aid.

It did not take him long to make the entire circuit of that charming resort, examining the recently built summer cottages, through whose windows lights were already beginning to shine, and stopping in front of the garden gates to see if he might not get sight of some one of his aunt's maids, or even herself, or his cousin in person.

At last, in a small inclosure, where two magnificent magnolias grew, casting their shade over everything, he chanced to see, under an arbor covered with a honeysuckle vine, his cousin sitting on a rustic bench, with her elbows on a marble table and her face resting in her hands, in a thoughtful attitude; she wore the same dress that she had worn while driving, and she had not even taken off her hat.

A strange light gleamed in the man's eyes. He went close to the grated gate, and made a sound just loud enough to be heard by the girl alone; she swiftly raised

her head, and a sudden flame passed over her face when she saw who it was that called her; then she went to the gate and opened it, greeting her cousin with a gracious smile to repay him, doubtless, for the cool treatment of the promenade.

Don Alfonso eagerly took both hands and pressed them warmly.

"Will you allow me?"

And without awaiting her answer, he raised them to his lips and kissed them no less eagerly. The girl quickly withdrew them, but the smile that lighted her face did not fade.

"I cannot escape my fate; I come to the Astillero, and the first person whom I meet is the one who most interests me."

"Yes, yes! the idea of saying that to me!" said Julia, just as gayly as before. "I am going to tell mamma. The last thing that she expects is to see you here."

"Haven't you told her?"

"She was lying down when I came, and I did not want to disturb her," replied the girl, blushing at the lie that she was telling.

"Well then, let us not go indoors quite yet; I have something to talk with you about first."

And he went and sat down in the summer house and took off his hat. Julia hesitated a moment; but finally sat down beside him.

"Don't you know what I want to tell you?" he began, giving her a keen and loving look.

"I am not a gypsy, my dear."

"It happened to be a gypsy who told me while I was in Seville that a sly, witty little brunette was going to kill me with disdain."

"And you believed her, simpleton?"

"Why not?"

"Because the only thing that you would die of would be rascality."

"A thousand thanks, cousin."

"I do not deserve them. Go on."

"Well, then, as to what I was going to tell you. . . . Do you know I have so much on my mind that I don't know where to begin! I suffer from the same thing that troubles orators."

"Then rest a few minutes. . . . Would you like a glass of water?"

"There is no need; like the ten commandments, it all reduces itself to two truths, — loving you above all things, and blowing my brains out if you don't love me."

"Are you sure that they are true?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Stuff and nonsense! Then I have made a mistake in this too!" said the girl, sighing with graceful irony.

"Cousin, cousin! what a wretched opinion you have of me. If you realized what this heart of mine suffers, and how completely ensnared it is in your net!"

"Cousin, cousin! you are too big a fish to fall into my net!"

"Then I swear to you that I am yours, that I have no other thought than you, and were I put to death for it, I have been able this long time to have no other thought than of you. . . . Do you know why I did not write to you while I was in Seville? . . ."

"Yes; because you did not care to."

"Nothing of the sort; it was so as to see if absence would not quench the flame that is consuming me. . . ."

"Flames! the idea! Hush! hush! don't be absurd!"

"Laugh as much as you will; but it does not prevent it from being true, that I have been passing through a

cruel struggle, and that I have suffered too much to write you. . . . 'Why?' I asked myself. 'It is vain to have hopes, since they would be surely disappointed. Were not the rebuffs that she gave me sufficient?' . . . For, cousin, you have a special talent for rebuffing a man; you not only give them once, but you delight in repeating the punishment, and then trying it another day with all the refinements of cruelty. I have set down in my note-book the rebuffs, the saucy answers, and even the insults which you gave me in one short fortnight. . . . It is a perfect marvel! . . . Look! . . . Under the head of hard words, you have called me *old* seven times, *audacious* twenty-seven times, *fool* twenty-two times, *proud* six times, *my son* once, *goose* once, *a genuine Don Juan* once, *impolite* once: total, sixty-six insults! . . . There you have it. . . ."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Julia, laughing heartily, and giving a slap at the note-book which sent it to the ground.

"It is the simple truth," rejoined Don Alfonso, picking it up. "And in spite of all that, I am stupid enough to go on loving you, or, to express myself better, to love you more and more every day, as is proved by my visit to Santander. Since I left you, Julia, I have not had a moment's peace; and though I have tried every possible way of distracting my thoughts so as to forget you, still ever your graceful form would come before my eyes. In Madrid I suffered much, because I was always kept hovering between fear, hope, and despair; but in Seville, far from you, I missed those sufferings, and it seemed to me that the pleasure of seeing you, of hearing your voice, and living under the same roof were a sufficient compensation for them, and even an advantage. . . . I don't know what has come over me; either I am mad, or you

have bewitched me. I have been all over the world, and have known many women, but I swear not one ever kept me so stirred up, so disquieted, so beside myself as you have. And I am telling you the truth, as you well know, since you have only to look into my face. . . ."

In very truth, Don Alfonso, in saying these words, appeared moved and trembling. And as his character, though affable, was cold and impassive, with touches of scorn, this emotion which he manifested caused double effect. He had taken possession of one of Julia's hands, and pressed it between his. The girl, rosy and smiling, exclaimed with a somewhat altered voice: —

"You paint things in such a lively fashion that I cannot help believing you."

"Yes, believe me, believe me, cousin!" said Saavedra, passionately kissing the hand which he held. "For although you do not love me, it fills me with pleasure to know that you know that I adore you with all my soul. My lot is cast; on your lips now hangs my fate. I deserve that you should destroy me for the incredible stupidity of having supposed, when I went away, that you loved me, and telling you so. How that act weighed upon me afterwards! I could not find hard names enough for myself. . . ."

"Then, see here; go on calling yourself hard names . . . for having once called yourself such without reason," said Julia, glancing at him half in malice, half in earnest.

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed Saavedra, anxiously.

"Quite possible."

"So that I . . ."

"Do you want me to feed you the truth with a spoon, cousin?" she asked, with some show of impatience.

"Ay! lovely cousin! most fascinating cousin! divine cousin! how happy you make me!"

Don Alfonso at the same moment took her into his arms, and pressed his lips to her cheek again and again, in spite of the girl's strenuous resistance.

"That'll do! that'll do!" she said, trying hard to be angry, and only half succeeding.

At that moment a white form appeared at the grating, and said, in a shrill voice: —

"Julia! Julita!"

She tore herself out of her cousin's arms, and hastened down to the gate: —

"Esperanza! wait; I am coming."

It was one of the neighbors with whom she had been driving that afternoon, and who now came to invite her to dinner, and a dance afterwards.

Don Alfonso also arose, and went to the gate, and gave the young lady a look which, if she had been made of gun-cotton, would have caused an explosion; but quickly controlling himself, he greeted her with all courtesy. . . .

Julia, somewhat confused, declined the invitation, under the pretext that her mamma had the neuralgia.

The neighbor, not less confused, and looking from one to the other, did not see fit to insist, and immediately withdrew to tell what she had seen, and what she had not seen.

As it was now dark, the cousins went into the house, where, after hearty greetings had been exchanged between aunt and nephew, the dinner was served.

While it lasted, Julia's cheeks were rosy as they had not been for months; her eyes shone with happy light, and in all her gestures and motions was betrayed the lively emotion that agitated her, and a joy which was not affected as at other times.

XIV.

MIGUEL had for some time been planning to gather a few friends at his house to celebrate, not only his marriage, but also the early prospect of an heir.

Although he did not confess it, he also flattered himself with the idea of showing them his suite, which, now entirely furnished, was like a silver cup, all bright and new and glorious to see; and there was also the boyish, though very pardonable, vanity of making his appearance before society as a hospitable housekeeper and the head of a family.

Maximina, on hearing the plan, was troubled and confused; it had never entered into her calculations to "do the honors" of a reception, especially as her husband had assured her that such a thing on their part would be presumptuous.

Whenever Miguel took her out for the evening to the house of any of their friends, she always felt constrained and awkward, without knowing what to say or do, and not taking her eyes from him, so that she might get courage. What would it be now when she would be obliged to greet everybody, to say to each some pleasant word, and to foresee and anticipate their every desire?

"Oh, Miguel! I should die of mortification."

He laughed at her timidity, and even found an additional incentive for his plan at the thought of seeing his wife, so girl-like, so innocent, and so timid, "officiating as señora."

At first he thought of having a breakfast, but soon gave that up because their dining-room was only large enough to seat a dozen guests.

Then it occurred to him to give an afternoon tea, which was a form of entertainment very fashionable at the time; but even this seemed too small to Miguel.

After many hesitations he made up his mind that it should be a 'reunion' or 'soirée,' with a lunch of preserved oranges. The excuse for it should be to hear the reading of a drama which one of the *Independencia* staff, Gómez de la Floresta, had written, and which had not yet been put upon the stage on account of the cabals of Ayala, García Gutiérrez, and other small fry, who ruled the theatres with a high hand, and "monopolized them."

"But didn't you say that this play was very dull, and that you had been bored to death when you heard it?" asked Maximina.

"That is the very reason. At this kind of 'reunion' it is absolutely indispensable that the thing read should be bad, so that all that follows after the reading may seem excellent to the guests. With this drama you can bring on champagne that cost only thirty reals, and it will be drunk like nectar."

Maximina did not understand very well this logic of her husband's, and she looked at him with very wide eyes; but seeing that he added nothing to make it clearer, she went to another subject, — that of the invitations.

"Whom would you invite?"

"Provisionally, mamma and Julia."

"Good; and then?"

"Cousin Serafina."

"Who would escort her?"

"Let Enrique accompany her."

"Shall we invite Eulalia?"

"Certainly; but I warn you that she will not come: her husband cannot abide me."

"And the De Rimírez family?"

"There is nothing against it."

"Asunción?"

"Certainly."

Maximina hesitated a moment, then grew more serious. and said hastily: —

"And those ladies up stairs, for example?"

A slight smile hovered on Miguel's lips, and he replied: —

"As you please."

"Aunt Anita,[1] of course."

"Yes; I should be glad to see your Uncle Manolo here."

"And what gentlemen shall we have?"

"That will be my part."

"Shall you invite the men on the paper?"

"We will see; according as the cloth holds out."

"And Carlitos?"

"Yes; it will be his duty to illuminate the 'reunion on all disputed points."

"And Mendoza?"

"Could we think of leaving out the most precious ornament? . . . But then, he is very much engaged just at present with his marriage and politics."

This business of the invitations having been settled, and it having been decided that certain letters should be written and certain calls made, Maximina remained for some time pensive and melancholy.

At last, taking her husband's hand and looking at him lovingly and sadly, she said: —

"I am sure that I am going to disgrace you, Miguel. . . . I am not used to these things. *Virgen María!* how much I would give to be like one of those elegant and lovely ladies that you bow to in the theatres. I don't see how you ever came to marry me, when I am neither beauti-

[1] Diminutive of Ana (Anna).

ful nor able to be compared with the ladies whom you know."

"Hush! hush!" said he, laying his fingers on her mouth. "I am prouder of having married you than if you had been a princess of the blood."

"I know this," she replied, her eyes overflowing with love and happiness; "I know that I am proud because I am your wife, and because you preferred me to any handsome, elegant, and rich woman; me, a poor, good-for-nothing. . . ."

"Hush! hush! or I will bite you," he repeated, kissing her passionately.

During the days that followed, as had been decided, they began their preparations and got out their cards. Miguel went in person to invite his Uncle Manolo.

He lived in a magnificent mansion in the Calle del Pez. Since his marriage he had changed few of his habits. It would be a great mistake to imagine that he had in the least abandoned the solicitous cares which he had always bestowed upon his elegant person: not at all! tinctures and cosmetics followed in harmony with the latest advances of chemistry; all bands and braces and the latest improvements in the science of orthopedics; the best shoemaker in Madrid; the most skilful dentist, the most fashionable tailor and perfumer in the city.

Uncle Manolo was a monument so admirably preserved that the Spanish government might have taken him for a pattern for theirs.

Nevertheless, merciless Time had been making some ravages in that proud edifice, and already some of his marks could be clearly seen on its façade; crow's-feet and wrinkles of every sort each day grew deeper and deeper; in spite of his shoulder-braces he bent a little more forward; his step, also, was not half as light and

firm as before. There was no question that the least carelessness or omission in the process of his self-preservation would bring him in ruins to the ground.

Miguel found his Aunt Ana, for variety's sake, by the chimney-corner; and this, although it was rather early in the season for fires. In her, as well as in her lord and master, the ravages of time were also manifest, so much so, that it was more easy to believe that the good lady, once married, had entirely forgotten the care and adornment of her person, since, in so short a period, such terrible decay had occurred.

For *la intendenta* had now quite the appearance of a septegenarian; her hair was thin and white, her face pale and withered, her waist like a barrel, and her hands dark and wrinkled and repulsive to look upon.

"Good day, aunt! How are you?"

"As usual, my son; and you?" she replied, indolently, in a plaintive voice.

"I am well; and uncle?"

"How should I know how your uncle is?" she replied bitterly. "It makes very little difference either. And your wife? Does her condition trouble her any?"

"Not at all; she is perfectly well."

Miguel noticed that the depreciative tone in which *la intendenta* always spoke of her husband had increased to an alarming degree; in the inflection of her voice could be perceived not only scorn, but even hatred. He therefore decided to avoid that subject, and to direct the subject to other themes.

But in spite of all his efforts *la intendenta* constantly found occasion to bring him in, as it were, "by the hair," and make some remark derogatory to her husband; and, naturally enough, this was not at all pleasing to Miguel. Consequently, after announcing the object of

his call, he broke off the conversation and went to his uncle's room.

He found him wrapped up in a magnificent dressing-gown, and seated reading his newspaper, while the barber was giving the last touches to the curl of his mustache.

He was not a little rejoiced to see his nephew, with whom he always kept up relations that were more like that of a comrade than an uncle; he forthwith accepted, with the greatest delight, his invitation, and concerning his proposed supper gave him some very wise advice from his own long experience.

"See here! Tell Lhardy to cook you some truffled quails, such as he sent a few days ago to the house of the Swedish minister, and some stuffed river pike, with a gravy of cream of soft-shelled crabs such as I ate at the De Velez ball. Beside this, have anything that you like. I will advise you that you ought to get your wines at Pardo's, on the Calle del Carmen. Ask for *Margot* ten years old, and tell Pardo that you are my nephew, so that he won't take advantage of you. . . . I give you the hint that you ought to warm it a little before inviting your guests into the dining-room. Tell him that you want such champagne as I always order. Don't buy any sherry: I will send you a couple of dozen bottles from a cask which I had as a present! it is the best I ever drank. . . . But, however, I will come round to your house on the day of your supper, to see that everything is going all right."

After the barber had been dismissed, Miguel was anxious to hear from his uncle something about his domestic life, since *la intendenta's* aggressive words did not pass from his memory. He began by circumlocutions so as to bring the conversation to the point desired; but when he reached it, his Uncle Manolo restrained him with a gesture full of dignity.

"Not a word about my wife, Miguel!"

He majestically extended his arm, scowled terribly, and his perfumed locks waved above his immortal head.

Miguel understood well by signs that the relations between his uncle and aunt could not be very cordial, and he made up his mind to watch them in silence.

"Come to breakfast," said Señor Don Manolo de Rivera, looking at his watch. "You will breakfast with us, will you not?"

"I have just had breakfast, uncle."

"Very well; then come and see us eat, and we will go out together."

They went to the dining-room, where the señora was waiting them, and husband and wife sat down at opposite sides of the table, while the nephew ensconsed himself in a chair not far from them.

But one thing instantly threw him into a state of stupefaction, and that was to see beside his uncle's plate, on the cloth, a large and magnificent six-shooter.

And his amazement increased when he saw his uncle push it away a little as though it were the tumbler, the napkin-ring, or any other of the indispensable paraphernalia of the service; and still more, to see his aunt pay no attention to it, but begin calmly to eat her boiled eggs as though this were the most natural thing in the world.

Our hero's imagination began to whirl faster than a wheel, and he was lost in a sea of conjectures; but he did not have the courage to ask what it all meant, although his curiosity was terribly piqued: he understood that such a question would be indiscreet. Not that he gave up the idea of finding out, but merely postponed it till a more fitting occasion.

Breakfast was finished without anything happening to

require the use of the deadly weapon which Señor de Rivera kept at his right hand; and this might have been expected, since at one o'clock in the day it is not common for robbers to break into houses.

The conversation was general, although the two elders seldom addressed each other, Uncle Manolo especially, taking evident pains completely to ignore his wife.

She, on the other hand, kept caroming phrases at him indirectly wounding and pinching him, while talking with Miguel.

The chivalrous *caballero*, when the charge hurt him, would give a wrathful look at his sweet enemy; and as she managed very cleverly to avoid it, he would shake his head in sign of wrath, and make an expressive face at his nephew, and then give his attention to what was in front of him.

When breakfast was over, Miguel took leave of his aunt very courteously, and after going back to his Uncle Manolo's room to help the old man put on his coat, they went into the street together.

As soon as they were fairly out of doors, Señor Rivera's ill-humor and the melancholy that had grown upon him during the last third of the meal vanished as by magic; he pulled out his case, gave Miguel a cigar, and lighted another, beginning to puff with satisfaction, while they were passing along San Jeronimo Avenue.

Miguel, however, could not keep the revolver out of his thoughts, and he was possessed to unravel the mystery concealed in it. When they had turned the corner of the Calle de la Puebla, he stopped a moment, and asked him boldly: —

"See here, uncle, though you may call me indiscreet, I am going to ask you a question, because I can no longer stand the torment of curiosity. . . . What the deuce is

the meaning of that revolver that you had beside your plate while you were at breakfast?'

On hearing this, the *ex-gentil caballero's* face once more darkened; he bent his head until his beard touched his breast, and began to walk on again without saying a word. After a considerable time he heaved a deep and most pitiable sigh, and began to speak in a low voice: —

"You must know, Miguel, that for some months past my life has been a hell! My wife (who, parenthetically, is the most loathsome woman that God ever put into the world) has taken it into her head to be jealous of me! Would you believe that such a piece of trumpery, an old shoe, has the slightest right to be jealous of a man like me? Does it not seem to you that I have done enough in burdening myself with her?

"Now, instead of thanking me for the sacrifice that I made in marrying her, she is foolish enough to believe that I ought to adore her, to be dying with love for her. And as this is the height of absurdity, and cannot be, she is eating out my very soul. When I get up, when I lie down, when I go out of the house, when I come in, when I eat, and when I sleep, never can I enjoy an instant's peace; above all, at meal-time she has been making such a martyr of me that I cannot eat half as much as I ought, and even then it troubles me to digest it. I cannot go on in this way without danger of losing my health. Great evils require heroic remedies; one day I took the revolver, and said to her: 'If at table you say another word to disturb me, I will put an ounce of lead into your head.'

"That was a happy idea, for since that time she has not said a single word more, and to-day only by taking advantage of your presence did she make a few indirect insinuations. My servant has been charged, when setting

the table, to place the revolver by my plate. . . . Perhaps you will imagine that she is jealous of some definite person, and that I am doing wrong not to break loose from this person, and thus avoid all occasion for torment; but there is nothing of the sort. Each day she is jealous of some different woman, and never once hits the truth. Man alive! to show you how stupid she is, I will tell you that day before yesterday a good lady, whom I happened never to mention to her, sent me a couple of dozen tarts; and she, without any more ado, flung the platter on the floor, and began to berate the servant like a sardine-woman. Tell me now if I don't need patience, and if it would not have been better for me to have had all the bones in my body broken than marry this calamity!"

Uncle Manolo ceased speaking, and continued silent for a long time, brooding over his sad thoughts. Miguel dared not disturb them, since he knew too well that it was hopeless for him to offer him any advice. Finally, that magnanimous man, richer every day in tribulations, stopped again, and asked his nephew, with severe intonation: —

"Tell me, Miguel, don't you know any place now infested by the cholera or any other contagious disease?"

"No, uncle; I do not," replied Miguel, struggling hard not to laugh. "What a strange idea! Do you wish to murder your wife?"

"Man! no, of course not to murder her. I only thought in any case of letting nature have its perfect work. . . . But could I have a blacker fate? Just imagine! I learn from a medical friend that Madrid is full of fevers and pneumonia, caused by the bad custom of riding on the Prado in September. Well now, after many entreaties, and 'making myself into syrup' to accomplish it, I succeeded in getting my wife out to drive with me several evenings. 'Come now,' I said to myself, 'if she does

not get pneumonia, she may at least catch a bit of a fever, and as she is feeble. . . .' Do you understand?"

"Perfectly! and did she?"

"Hush, man, hush! The one who caught a catarrh, and had to stay in the house four days was . . . myself. I haven't got over my cough yet!"

All this time they were walking along the Calle de Peligros, and they saw coming toward them a young woman not at all bad-looking, since she had bright, rosy complexion and red lips; her dress was attractive and rather scanty. As she passed she smiled upon Uncle Manolo, giving him a very expressive salute.

"Who is that girl?" asked Miguel.

"Don't you know her? She is Josefina García, one of the ballet at Los Bufos."

And after they had walked a few steps farther, he added, with some perturbation:—

"See here, Miguel, if you will excuse me, I will leave you. . . . At five we will meet at La Cervecería,[1] if you say so."

"All right, uncle, all right," he added, without being able to hide a smile; "go where you please. We'll meet again."

And they took leave of each other, shaking hands.

XV.

How much anxiety, how much misery it caused Maximina to make ready for their 'fiesta'! Her slow and painstaking character ill accorded with Miguel's marvellously quick and lively bent. Hence it came about that in arranging the details of the affair little differences of opinion sprang up between the two.

[1] From *cervecería*, a tavern or alehouse.

Miguel, not taking into account that it was the first time that she had ever found herself engaged in such a rout, demanded impossibilities of her.

The poor child, seeing his annoyance, made incredible efforts to have everything right, not because the result made much difference to her, but because she feared worse than death any blame from her husband.

Miguel, not noticing it, and being carried away by his impatience, did not spare his criticisms on every occasion, harassing and mortifying her beyond measure; only when, after some remark made in a harsh tone, he saw the tears gathering in her eyes, would he perceive how unjust and cruel he had been, and going to her he would cover her with kisses, and beg her pardon.

Maximina would instantly become happy, and drying her eyes, would say with touching innocence:—

"I will do what I can to satisfy you. You will not scold me any more, will you?"

At last the preparations were all completed. A few new articles of furniture were bought for the parlor, and it was put into elegant condition. The table was laid in the next room, which was the library, and in this task they were greatly assisted by Uncle Manolo. A few extra servants were engaged for the occasion; one of the bedrooms was put into order for a ladies' dressing-room; the stairway was adorned with vases of flowers and brilliantly lighted, and the same was true of all the rooms in the house. The porter was tempted by a good large fee to allow the door to be kept open and the entrance lighted all night.

Likewise nothing that concerned the dress to be worn by Maximina at the party was neglected. Miguel insisted that it should be rich and magnificent, but she was intensely opposed to this; finally it was decided to leave

the matter to the dressmaker. And on the very day of the 'fiesta,' early in the morning, that personage herself came with a dress, of great simplicity, to be sure, but of the utmost elegance. But, oh, how unfortunate! the dress was open in front in the form of a heart.

Miguel found his wife in despair on a sofa with the dress in her hands, and almost ready to cry, while the modiste, with difficulty repressing her anger, was arguing that the suggestion to have it filled in was out of the question, and that no lady when she had such a party at her house ever failed to wear a dress more or less *décolleté*, and that in this case the front was neither too high nor too low.

To all this Maximina replied sweetly, but firmly, that she had never worn a low-necked dress, and that she should die of mortification if she did so now.

Miguel at first sided with the modiste; but when he saw the sadness painted on his wife's face, he was secretly flattered by her delicate modesty, and suddenly changed his mind, saying: —

"Very well; don't say anything more about the matter. If the dress can be altered for this evening, let it be done; if not, wear one of the best ones that you have already."

It was difficult to persuade the modiste to alter it; but finding that both of them were firmly resolved, she saw nothing else to do, and she and Maximina put their heads together to remedy it as well as they could.

In the evening, after the table was set and Uncle Manolo was gone, the young couple were left alone with the servants.

Maximina shut herself in her room to dress, and Miguel did the same.

When he had finished his toilet he ordered all the lamps to be lighted.

Shortly after the house was illuminated, Maximina came from her room, looking like a rosebud.

"Oh, how sweet!" exclaimed Miguel, when he saw her coming into the study, where he was selecting the books to be scattered over the tables.

The young wife smiled and blushed.

"Come, don't make sport of me!"

"Why should I make sport of you, darling, since you are lovelier than ever!"

In point of fact, Maximina, who had grown much prettier since her marriage, now beamed in all the fresh and artless beauty with which Heaven had endowed her.

Her dress was of a delicate brown, and to cover the opening they devised an under-handkerchief of a very fine grenadine.

Miguel took her by the hands and looked at her for several moments, his eyes beaming with love. The maids crowded around the door and looked in to see their mistress.

"Isn't it true that my wife is very pretty?" he asked of them.

"Most beautiful, señorito!"

"She is just a very virgin!" exclaimed Juana.

"Not quite!" replied Miguel, mischievously.

"Stop it, *tonto*, stop it!" she exclaimed, in embarrassment, tearing herself from his hands and starting to run.

They sat down to table as usual, but ate very little: Maximina especially had no appetite for anything; they kept constantly interrupting each other to suggest some detail that was lacking, and more than once Maximina jumped up to attend to it herself.

Then they went to the parlor and waited patiently for their guests. Maximina was trembling with excitement. Miguel showed a nervous joy, for he was not certain that

the 'fiesta' would prove to be a success, and he was afraid of anything ridiculous. He gave his wife his arm, and they began to promenade up and down the parlor, glancing at the mirrors as they passed them. Maximina hardly recognized herself: she was surprised to appear such a respectable and elegant señora.

"Do you see!" said Miguel; "everything depends on appearances in this world: these people who are coming are neither more nor less respectable than we are; consequently you have no reason to be afraid."

In spite of these encouragements, Maximina kept growing more timid; each instant she imagined that she heard steps on the stairs.

"Come now; imagine that I am a guest coming this very moment. . . ." (*Miguel went to the anteroom and came back again, making low bows*). "Señora, at your feet! . . . How do you do this evening? It is a genuine honor and a great satisfaction to be present at this *soirée*, where my friend Miguel wants to show everybody how happy he is in his choice. . . . But he deserves this happiness . . . he is an excellent young man; you also, señora, will have little reason to repent. The truth is, I have been anxious to see him married; and though he is to be envied, all of his friends, including myself, wish him greater happiness every day of his life. . . . (Come, wife, say something.)"

Maximina, standing motionless in the middle of the parlor, listened, with her mouth open and a smile on her lips.

"Answer, wife. . . . Come now; I see that you will never be a star of society. . . . Nor is there any reason why you should be," he added gently.

And suddenly, taking her by the waist, he darted with her through the parlor, making a few turns of a waltz.

At that instant the bell rang. Both stopped as though

petrified and instantly let go of each other: Miguel went into his study. The servant opened the door, and a young man made his appearance, who proved to be none other than Gómez de la Floresta.

Miguel had forgotten that the reading of his drama was the pretext for the party, and he felt some slight vexation to see him, manuscript in hand; but he received him no less cordially.

The three sat down in the study and talked for a long while, as the poet was far ahead of time.

The next to arrive was Utrilla, the ex-cadet of the military school, whom Miguel had taken pains to invite, not only on account of the friendship that existed between them, but also because of his pity for his blind love for Julita, and the hope that she might at last come to return it. He was in evening dress, the same as Gómez de la Floresta.

Then came in quick succession his cousins Enrique and Serafina, Mendoza, Julita and her mother, with Saavedra, *Rosa de té* and Merelo y García, the De Ramírez ladies, and Miguel's cousins, Vicente and Carlitos; Asunción and two other young ladies whose names we do not remember, and a few other guests.

What Miguel had foreseen came to pass: Maximina, smiling and blushing, received the people without any of those meaningless and polite phrases which are customary on such occasions; but her naturalness and modesty made a great and very favorable impression on every one. La Señora de Ramírez said to Miguel in an aside: —

"How good your wife must be, Rivera!"

"What makes you think so?"

"It is enough to see her face."

"Yes; she is very *simpática*," said one of the girls, with a condescending tone.

The guests formed groups, and were conversing gayly. Gómez de la Floresta was burning with impatience.

At last Miguel, not so much to gratify him, as to have everything pass off in good form, invited him to begin the reading of the play: he took his stand by the side of the fireplace, under a gas-fixture; the people scattered themselves at their convenience on the chairs and sofas; a servant brought on a waiter various refreshments, and placed them as well as he could on the mantel-piece near the poet.

Gómez de la Floresta coughed two or three times, cast a troubled glance over his audience, and then began the reading of his drama, which was entitled *The Serpent's Hole*, and was cast in the time of Carlos II.,[1] the *Bewitched*.

As we know the author, there is no need of saying that the lyric note prevailed in it; that it was couched in sonorous verse, that it abounded in elegant and exotic adjectives; in writing it he had put under contribution the beautiful and picturesque phrases of our *Esmaltes y Camáfeos*,[2] of Théophile Gautier, and the no less beautiful but more spontaneous ones of our own Zorilla.

The result was a composition of beautiful words in diapason, producing a notable musical effect, alternating with some phrase or sentence *à la* Victor Hugo. Not a single character said anything in a straightforward manner: instead of telling who they were and whence they came, they drowned themselves by anticipation in a river or cascade of Oriental pearls, moonbeams, dewdrops, perfumes of Arabia, sunsets and sapphires and emeralds, so that the thread of the discourse was lost, and no one could gather the least idea of its character and tendency.

[1] Carlos II., *el Hechizado*, reigned over Spain 1665–1700.
[2] Literally, Enamels and Cameos.

When he was half through the act, the Countess de Losilla and her two daughters came in, later than all the rest, since they lived the nearest of all. Their entrance for a few moments interrupted the reading; all arose, and Maximina hastened to greet them.

All the ladies looked sharply and eagerly at the young ladies' dresses and jewelry, which were in the highest degree elegant and original, especially that of Filomena, who had a remarkable genius for inventing and combining adornments, departing from the fashion when she pleased, or changing it according to her own caprice; she knew how to make the most of her extreme slenderness by wearing dresses such as would have been unbecoming to any other girl, and she took pains by her extraordinary manner of brushing her hair to make the strange originality of her face more brilliant.

During the interruption the poet fortified himself with a glass of currant juice.

Then the reading began anew. At the end of the act, there were signs of approbation, especially among the young ladies, to whom, though they had not understood a word, it had sounded very fine. A few gentlemen remained in the parlor while the dramatist was resting: he and one or two others had gone into the corridor to smoke.

"What does *Rosa de té* think about it?" asked one of the gentlemen, addressing the young critic.

Rosa de té reddened, and spoke a few incoherent words.

"Leave him, leave him alone with his grief!" said Miguel, who happened to be in this group. "When the heroes of comedies and novels do not adopt resolutions, it makes him desperate."

The drama was finished at eleven o'clock, to the great and ill-concealed satisfaction of each and all of the company.

During the last act the girls yawned in an angelic manner; the gentlemen exchanged expressive winks under the poet's very nose. Then came encouraging and prolonged applause! All broke out into eulogies, and predicted great things for the piece.

Gómez, overwhelmed, flushed, and trembling from head to foot, acknowledged the compliments by laying his hand on his heart, really believing that his work was already saved from the "claws of the public."

The poor fellow had no idea that many of those who were applauding him had all ready a howl for the "first night" of his play, in vengeance for the forced applause that they had given him.

After this the ladies went to the library, where supper was served. The gentlemen took their places in the rear, and there began that buzzing of flat and conventional phrases between both sexes, which constitutes what has been called the "witchery of the salon."

At that moment, after Gómez de la Floresta's drama, nothing that was said could fail to seem clever or to excite the mirth of the guests; something, and it is not extravagant to say much, was contributed to this desirable state of things by the sight of the well-laden and decorated table, which in its final state was the work of Uncle Manolo.

Saavedra had been sitting the whole evening behind Julia, whispering clever things in her ear, while Utrilla, seated not far from them, and suffering as though they were roasting him on a gridiron, gazed at them fiercely, and planned how he might call his rival to one side, and demand an explanation as soon as the chance presented itself. We already know that in the matter of explanations he was no amateur.

It is befitting that we say a few words in regard to the

state in which Julia's relations with her cousin and the ex-cadet were placed.

Don Alfonso had spent a few days at the Astillero with his aunt and cousin, and during this time he had settled his love-affair with Julia on a firm basis.

Then he went to Paris, intending to arrange his business, and return to Spain for good. In the first days of September he really returned to Madrid, but he did not lodge at his aunt's; reasons of delicacy, which he explained to Julia, compelled him to this.

While he was in Paris he wrote few letters, and these in the fluent terms of cousinly rather than lover-like affection. Julia's pride forbade her asking any explanations; but when he returned he hastened to give them, telling her in rather obscure terms that he wanted to keep his relations with her secret for a time, so as conveniently to settle his affairs, and announce their engagement to his family at the earliest possible moment, and thus realize the union which he so eagerly desired.

This secret and somewhat underhanded conduct, instead of dampening Julia's ardor, each day made her more and more her cousin's slave.

Don Alfonso, when he was not sleeping, spent almost all the hours of the day at his aunt's house; he was often there to dinner, and likewise often went to drive or to the theatre with them.

As for our *bizarre* cadet, his fate could not have been more desolate. Julita had broken off entirely with him; and on this account he had fallen into such a decline that it was pitiful to see him: his sallow complexion had turned green; his bones could be counted even at a long distance; only one thing had grown in his body, and that was his Adam's apple; this had reached really fantastic proportions.

As Miguel was going along the vestibule, he felt that some one touched his shoulder.

It was Utrilla.

"Don Miguel, I want to ask a favor of you."

"You shall, my dear boy."

"It is absolutely necessary that you and some other friend this very moment carry my challenge to this Señor Saavedra. I thought of doing it myself, but I am rather excited, and I do not care to let myself cause a scandal in your house."

Miguel remained a moment undecided, and then said: —

"My dear fellow, you must understand that as Señor Saavedra is my sister's cousin, and as the motive of the trouble is for her sake, I could not possibly mix myself up in such an affair. . . . But as you are my very dear friend, and as I would desire to save you annoyance, I will do what I can for you. It is necessary, however, that you promise not to take any step in this business, and to leave the entire direction of it to me."

"I promise you."

Miguel wanted to gain time and save the poor lad, and his own family as well, a serious unpleasantness.

"I ought to warn you," he said afterwards, with a smile, "that Saavedra is one of the most famous of marksmen."

"That makes no difference to me," rejoined Utrilla, making a gesture worthy of Roland or Don Quixote.

The brigadier's son looked at him surprised at such valor, at once ridiculous and heroic.

On returning to the parlor, after giving a few directions, he casually fell in with Filomena, who was coming from the dressing-room with a box of rice-powder in her hand.

"I was anxious to meet you so as to whisper in the tenderest, tenderest voice that you are angelic, maddening!" said the heathen, approaching her with an insinuating smile, and bringing his mouth close to her ear.

"Come now, none of your nonsense, you bad boy! With such a young and lovely wife, aren't you ashamed to be making love to the girls?"

He suddenly grew serious; but quickly coming to himself, he retorted with a laugh: —

"The priest's benediction was not able to rob me of my innate qualities, and one of them was the love of the beautiful."

"You men are all alike; *art! beauty!* Little words by which you try to conceal your lack of shame!"

"Thanks, Filo, for at least having used the plural. It is to be understood under all circumstances that I reserve the right of admiring you."

The girl shrugged her shoulders, and made a disdainful face, and suddenly taking the powder-puff, she dabbed it upon his cheek.

"Hold on, hold on!" said Miguel, catching her by one arm; "you don't escape me without wiping it off!"

"What! do you imagine that I am afraid to do it?" she asked, giving him a provoking smile.

And without further delay she began to rub it off with her handkerchief.

Miguel's eyes gleamed with an unnatural light, and as his lips were not far from the girl's head, he bent over quickly and touched them to her forehead.

Filomena straightened herself up with equal rapidity, and giving him a look that was half severe and half mischievous, said: —

"You had better be a little careful!"

When she had finished, Miguel said: —

"To reward you for this good deed I am going to offer you my arm to take you back to the parlor."

The girl took it without saying a word. After the kiss she had grown serious.

When they went in, everybody was there before them. Maximina, who was sitting on a sofa talking with Saavedra, looked at them with a mixture of surprise and desolation which would have touched Miguel if he had taken time to think about it.

A girl was seated at the piano and playing the first strains of a waltz. Uncle Manolo came very politely to invite Maximina, and she allowed herself to be taken out for the dance. Then Miguel, after a moment of hesitation (caused either by remorse or because he knew how jealous his wife was of Filomena), finally asked the girl to waltz.

"You dance very well, niece," said Uncle Manolo, stopping a moment to rest. "Who taught you?"

"Miguel."

"I am not surprised then; Miguelito has always been a famous dancer."

Maximina had present proof of it, and to her sorrow, for her husband at that moment floated by them, scarcely touching the floor, and holding in his arms his light burden. The young wife did not for a moment lose them from sight. The next time that they crossed in front of her, they were promenading, and the girl had his arm. Miguel looked at his wife, and she replied with a forced smile.

"How does my wife dance, uncle?"

"Admirably! She excels Lola Montez."

"So I see. She has turned you into a watering-pot!"

In fact, great drops of sweat ran down the worthy *caballero's* brow, and he tried to arrest them to prevent them inundating his side-whiskers.

Maximina soon grew weary, and expressed her desire to sit down. As soon as she had taken her place, Saavedra came and sat by her side; and Uncle Manolo went off to invite some other young lady.

Ever since the beginning of the party the Andalusian gentleman's eyes had persistently followed Maximina, and by a slight trembling and closing of the eyelids had expressed perfect approval of her. Don Alfonso was a most intelligent connoisseur of the female sex; he never failed to be fascinated either by brilliancy, by far-fetched originality, or by adornments; he appreciated in women genuine beauty and grace, winsome innocence and freshness; like every one who for long years has cultivated any art *con amore*, he had come to hate all things that savored of affectation, and to worship only simplicity; the conversation of coquettes amused him, but did not conquer him.

Thus it was that Maximina had always been extremely pleasing to him, and he had shown it more than once at his aunt's house. He said of her that her modesty and innocence did not belong to this day, but to the golden age; one time when he addressed a guarded bit of flattery to her, in the presence of *la brigadiera* and Julia, the child grew so crimson that Don Alfonso resolved not to do so again, for fear it should be suspected that he was making love to her.

This evening she struck his fancy more than ever. As Maximina did not usually care much for the adornment of her person, the elegance which she now displayed made her look truly brilliant. The Andalusian *caballero* with the boundless audacity characteristic of him, made up his mind to try a little gallantry, without any meaning in it, of course.

He was too skilful not to know that in this case he

must lay aside his usual tactics as useless and dangerous. Nothing about flowers and flattery; still less, significant looks. A fluent talk about the ball, about the preparations which the young wife had been obliged to make; questions, and more questions, always being careful to repeat her name many times, since Don Alfonso had learned by experience that every woman enjoys this repetition.

Maximina replied amiably, but in few words; her face showed a peculiar absent-minded expression which vexed the Andalusian, and disconcerted him a little. Instead of holding himself firmly in the attitude which he had proposed he began to allow himself to yield, and soon found himself giving signs of the interest which she inspired in him.

Meanwhile, Miguel, after stopping and talking with two or three ladies for a little while, returned and sat down by Filomena. She received him with a look that was half severe and half quizzical.

"Why have you come here? . . . Get you gone!"

"So as to count the patches that you have on your left cheek: I have made out that there are seven on the right cheek, distributed in conformity with the precepts of art."

"Ah! have you come to insult me?"

"In what chronicle have you read that a Rivera ever insulted a Losilla?"

"Never till this moment; but in the centuries to come it will be known that a Rivera had the discourtesy to tell a Losilla that she wore patches."

"As Heaven is my witness, how that chronicler who reported such thing would lie! El Rivera has said it and stands ready to support his statement in the lists that La Losilla has lovely patches on her face, and that they are

of such and such a kind, and applied in such skilful sort that the most ingenious artificer could not have placed them with more neatness."

"Let us drop fables; the main thing now is that I do not wish you to approach me under this appearance of a *blasé* ladykiller! Do you hear? The people will be thinking that you are making love to me."

"Very well; I will not make love to you: what do you want me to do, then?"

Filomena cast another look of feigned anger at him.

"How graceful! Do you know, Señor de Rivera, that in spite of your audacity, I imagine that you are a person who has not yet got all your wisdom teeth?"

Miguel smiled without replying.

Maximina, who was sitting directly opposite, kept directing timid glances toward them.

Meanwhile, Julia, who had very quickly noticed the persistent attention which her sister-in-law was receiving from Saavedra, and the eagerness that he showed in talking with her, began to grow nervous and irritable, so that her annoyance showed in her face. She endeavored vainly, by a rather inopportune gesture, to bring him back to her side. Finding herself defeated and humiliated, blind with jealousy and anxious to have revenge on Saavedra, she began to flirt with Utrilla. O fortunate cadet! and who could have predicted that in one instant thou wouldst be enabled to pass from those unendurable torments to the summit of all bliss and felicity? For as soon as Julita and he drew near each other, it was as though the poles of positive and negative electricity were brought into contact: the flash of love was visible to everybody.

Julita smiled, blushed, prattled, gave him her fan and her gloves, and the flowers from her bosom, and devoured him with her eyes; but this did not prevent her from now

and then looking surreptitiously at her cousin and sister-in-law and casting angry glances at them.

Maximina was endeavoring with all the power of her soul to divine what her husband was saying to Filomena: the affected gravity with which they both spoke did not help to calm her; she knew from experience that Miguel was apt to put on a serious face when he was going to say to that young lady any piece of impudence that came into his mind.

"Don't you have any longing for Pasajes?" Saavedra was asking.

"A little, yes, sir; but here I am very happy."

"How long is it since you were married?"

"It will be nine months on the fourth."

Don Alfonso said nothing for several moments and seemed to be thinking; then he said sadly: —

"How many times I have passed by Pasajes and seen those cottages stretching along the shore of the bay, without ever having thought of stopping there!"

"You have not lost much; everybody says it is a very ugly village; except the church, which is rather fine, Don Joaquin's house, Arrequi's, and a few in the Ancho, there is nothing much to see."

"Now, of course, it can't amount to anything . . . but before. . . ."

Maximina looked at him in surprise.

"It was formerly not as good as now; the best houses were built about five or six years ago."

"Before, it was worth infinitely more, because you were there."

"Mercy! what difference did it make whether I were there or not?" exclaimed Maximina, innocently.

"Because here or there, or wherever you happened to be," replied the *caballero*, piqued by the young matron's

ingenuous indifference, so absolutely free from coquetry, "you would always be something so precious as to attract every one's attention. And what makes you more precious still, and more worthy of admiration, is that you have not the remotest idea of your value: you are a beautiful, fresh, fragrant, aromatic flower, which is absolutely unconscious of itself. . . ."

Maximina had not heard Don Alfonso's last words, perceiving that her husband had just given Filomena an intense look — we cannot tell what she saw in it — that congealed her with terror: she grew as pale as wax, and suddenly conceiving an idea that she thought might be her salvation, she got up without replying to Saavedra, and going straight to Filomena, she said in a hoarse voice, trying to smile: —

"Filomena, do you want to see that edging that I was speaking about yesterday?"

Miguel and Filomena looked up in amazement. Miguel was more ashamed than surprised.

"With great pleasure, dear," said the young woman.

Maximina started to go toward the door. Filomena paused a moment to give a retort to Rivera's last jest.

"Are you coming or not?" asked the young wife, halting in the middle of the parlor, and giving her a look barbed with hatred.

Miguel had never seen in his wife's eyes such an expression, nor imagined that her voice could have such a ring.

"Yes, yes; I am coming, Maximina!" said the young woman, hastening to rise.

And at the same time, making a little face at Miguel, she said in a low voice: —

"Do you see? Your wife is already jealous!"

Miguel watched them go out, not without a feeling of vexation.

Saavedra, seeing his partner get up so unexpectedly, and thus casting such a slur on his reputation as a lady-killer, frowned darkly and bit his lips in vexation. Julia, who in spite of her apparent absorption in conversation with Utrilla, had not lost the slightest detail of this scene, burst into a harsh laugh. Saavedra gave her an angry and malignant look, the meaning of which she was very far from suspecting at that time.

The party was brought to an end by Señór de Ramírez taking out his watch and announcing in a loud voice that it was half-past two in the morning. Various mammas arose as though moved by springs; the girls reluctantly followed their example; a great group was formed in the centre of the parlor; numberless farewells were heard, a clatter of kisses, and ripples of feminine laughter.

The young couple took their place at the stairway door, and bade good night to their guests, at the same time adding their assistance to that of the servants in the putting on of wraps. They were overwhelmed with thanks and congratulations. Then everything relapsed into silence.

Miguel and his wife returned to the parlor. Maximina was extremely pale, as her husband could see out of the corner of his eye; he also noticed that she flung herself down upon a sofa.

He, pretending to be absent-minded, put out the candles that were burning in the candelabra on the mantel-piece, and set some of the furniture in place. On returning from the other room one time, he saw his wife with her face buried in a pillow and sobbing. He went to her and said with affected surprise: —

"Crying?"

The poor child did not reply.

"What are you crying for?" he added, with cruel coldness.

Still Maximina made no answer.

Miguel waited an instant, still standing; then he went and sat down at the other end of the sofa.

The lights in the chandeliers burned silently; nothing was heard but the noises made by the servants in the dining-room and kitchen; the atmosphere of the parlor was filled with the penetrating odor compounded of all the perfumes which the ladies had brought with them. Brigadier Rivera's son, bending forward with his elbows resting on his knees, was playing with his glove.

At the end of a long silence Maximina exclaimed in the midst of her sobs: —

"*Madre mia!* how unhappy I am to-day!"

Miguel's face was violently contracted into an expression of anger; after a while, trying to soften his voice, but still letting it sound very harsh, he said: —

"I had not the slightest idea of such a thing. I did not think that you were so badly married!"

"No, Miguel, no," she hastened to say; "you are very good to me, but this evening you have greatly tortured me . . . perhaps without being aware of it."

Miguel gave an ironical laugh.

"I am not the one who tortures you . . . it is your own self. You insist on seeing visions, you lose your wits, and when it is least to be expected, *zas!* you are committing some solecism! . . . What you just did, getting up in a state of anger and calling Filomena, . . . and the severity with which you spoke to her, might have compromised us in everybody's eyes. . . . Fortunately she is a talented girl who knew how to dissemble. . . ."

"Yes, yes; dissemble because it suited her convenience. Indeed, I believe that she dissembles!"

"Come now, don't talk nonsense, Maximina."

"I am telling the truth, and everybody saw it. . . .

This woman either loves you or wants to torment me. This whole evening long she has not ceased to look sneeringly at me. . . ."

"Do you realize how ridiculous you are with your jealousy? Why should Filomena look at you in such a way? You know her character too well, that she is always joking, and that this saucy expression is habitual to her eyes."

"That is right; take her part, take her part!" exclaimed the young wife, in a tone of deep pain. "She is the good saint, the talented woman! I am the fool, the absurd, the ridiculous!"

Miguel jumped up, gave his wife an angry look, and shrugging his shoulders, exclaimed: —

"What stupidity!"

And he slowly walked toward his study. When Maximina heard her husband's steps, she quickly raised her head and cried in supreme anguish, her eyes swimming with tears: —

"Miguel! Miguel!"

But he, without even turning his head, replied with affected disdain: —

"Go to the deuce!" And he left the room.

Foolish Miguel! cowardly Miguel! Years will pass, and when you remember those words, you will feel your heart torn within you and the tears wet your cheeks. But at that instant, excited by anger, he had no thought of his injustice and cruelty nor of the havoc which they might cause in his wife's sensitive and tender soul. He sat down by his table, opened a book, and began to read: but he could not regain his calmness; at the end of a few minutes his conscience began to prick him; the letters blurred before his eyes so that he could not make out a sentence. He closed the book, got up, and returned to the parlor with an earnest desire for reconciliation.

Maximina was no longer there.

He went to the library and her sleeping-room, but failed to find her; he went to the dining-room and the inner apartments; still no Maximina. He asked the servants, but they could give no tidings about her. Then imagining that in her grief she had gone to hide somewhere, he began a regular search; but as he was passing near the stairway door, he paused anxious and dumfounded, with consternation painted on his face: —

"Have any of you opened the door?"

"No, señorito; we have not moved from here."

Pale as death, he snatched his hat that was hanging on the rack, and leaped down the stairs, which were still lighted. He found the janitor just in the act of putting out the lights.

"Remigio, have you seen my wife go out?"

The janitor, the janitor's wife and mother-in-law looked at him in amazement. Perceiving the imprudence of such a question, he added: —

"I don't know but what she may have gone home with my mother and sister. Mother felt ill, and my wife did not want to let her go. . . ."

"Señorito, we cannot tell you anything with certainty. Many ladies went out . . . we could not distinguish."

"Just a few minutes ago," said a six-year-old girl, "I saw a lady go out alone. . . ."

"We have been to the court to carry a few flower-pots from the stairway," explained the janitor's wife.

Miguel, without any further words, darted out of the door.

"Señorito, are you going out that way? You will surely get your death a-cold!"

In fact, he was in his dress-suit. Stopping, and making a great effort to appear calm, he replied: —

"That is a fact; do me the goodness to run up and get my overcoat."

When they brought it to him, he said, as he put it on: —

"Thank you much. Please not lock up until I come; I shall not be long."

"Don't trouble yourself, señorito; we will wait for you."

As soon as he was in the street, he knew not whither to direct his steps; his heart beat violently; he was so anxious that his clearness of mind entirely deserted him.

After hesitating a few moments, he started to go along the Plaza del Ángel, without any reason for it; but there was just as little for choosing any other direction.

He quickened his steps as soon as he could, without seeing any one beside the watchman on the corner.

He entered the Calle de Carretas, and saw only a group of young men going along discussing literature.

When he reached the Puerta del Sol,[1] he made out in the distance, near San Jeronimo Avenue, a woman's form; he felt a strong emotion, and without thinking that he might be taken for an evil-doer, he started to run after her. She was a *desgraciada*, who, as she turned around to see who was following her in that way, met the young man's astonished and startled eyes.

"See here, señorito!" she cried in a coarse voice.

But Miguel had already dashed by her down the Calle del Principe. And suddenly he found himself again in the Plaza de Santa Ana. Then he stood still, and clutching his temples with his hands, exclaimed aloud, in a voice of anguish: —

"My God, what has happened to me!"

He looked in every direction, in discouragement, and seeing no one, he made his way into the gardens in the

[1] The central square in Madrid.

centre, so as to reach his house as soon as possible, and ask the janitor's assistance. But just as he was near home, he saw a woman's dress gleaming on one of the benches there. It did not take him many steps to make certain that it was his wife.

"Maximina! Maximina!"

The child, who was sobbing with her head leaning on the back of the seat, instantly lifted it. Miguel took her by the hand, gently lifted her to her feet, with the same gentleness made her lean upon his arm, and silently crossed the distance that separated them from his dwelling. As they entered the doorway, he said, naturally, so as to be heard by all: "Why didn't you tell me, wife? You gave me a great fright."

The janitor and his wife bowed.

"Can we shut up now, señorito?"

"Whenever you please."

They mounted the stairs in the same silence as before. They entered their apartment, and after giving suitable orders for all the lights to be put out, Miguel took his wife to her room; he locked the door, and going to the little wife, who was looking at him full of fear and even anguish, he made her sit down in a chair; then kneeling at her feet, and kissing her hands tenderly, he said: —

"Forgive me!"

"Oh, no, Miguel!" she cried, in the height of confusion and mortification, and making desperate efforts to kneel down, and make her husband rise. "Don't put me to shame, for Heaven's sake! I am the one, indeed I am, who ought to ask your forgiveness for the atrocity which I have just committed, for the pain I have given you. . . . Let go of me! Let go of me! . . . Do you forgive me? . . . I was mad, perfectly mad. . . . I thought that you did not love me, and my better judg-

ment deserted me. I wanted to die, and nothing else."

"Hush, hush!" he replied, by main force keeping her in her seat. "To-morrow do whatever you please; to-night it is my right to ask your forgiveness, and to swear before God that I will never again as long as I live give you cause for jealousy, either with the girl up stairs or any other."

And the report goes that he fulfilled his vow.

XVI.

It happened that one clear, cool February evening, as they were walking along the street, Maximina said to her husband: —

"I feel very tired. Don't you want to go home?"

"Is it only weariness," he asked, looking at her with interest. "Don't you feel ill?"

"A little," she said, leaning somewhat heavier on his arm.

"I will call a carriage."

"No, no! I am perfectly able to walk."

In spite of her willingness, however, Maximina found walking each moment more difficult; her husband perceiving it, quickly stopped, and considered for a moment; then taking her hand, said: —

"I am sure that I know what the trouble is; I am going to call a carriage."

The young wife hung her head as though detected in some crime. They stopped the first Simon that passed without a fare, and rode home. As soon as they were in doors, Miguel put on the bearing of a general on the eve of battle; he began to give curt and peremptory

orders to the maids. In a short time nothing was heard but hurried steps and whisperings; women appeared bringing bed linen, dishes, bottles, and other articles. There was a call at the door; it proved to be the janitor and his wife, and they with the servants held a long and anxious council, everybody speaking in a whisper.

Miguel presided silently and solemnly over the making of the great nuptial couch, while Maximina, seated in one of the easy-chairs in the library, watched them, her face pale and anxious.

"How much trouble you take for my sake, Miguel!"

"For your sake?" exclaimed he, half surprised and half disturbed. "I certainly should be a fine fellow not to put myself to some trouble for my wife on such an occasion."

The poor child repaid him with a loving smile.

The bed was very quickly made. Juana looked at it enthusiastically.

"Señorito, it is like an altar! Would the queen's be finer?"

"There is no queen any longer, woman. Do me the favor not to stand there like a post. Take the alcohol stove and put it on the dressing-table. . . . Quick! quick! And the other girls — what are they doing in the kitchen?"

"Both of them have gone on errands."

"What! haven't they got back yet?"

"But, señorito, they have only just gone out!"

"Come now, stop talking, and go after the stove."

Juana left the room, utterly dumfounded; the señorito had suddenly changed his character; he acted like a madman! He walked up and down through the house, with long strides; he gave more orders now in a moment than in a month before, and was vexed at everything that was

said to him. From time to time he would go to his wife, and ask her anxiously: —

"How are you feeling now?"

More than a hundred times he had been to the door and listened; but no one came. In desperation he again began his agitated walk. At last he thought that he heard steps on the stairs. . . . Could it be! . . . Nothing; it was only the janitor carrying up a telegram to the third story. The mischief take it! Another spell of waiting! "How wretched! Where can that miserable Plácida have gone? Surely she must be gallivanting with that young sergeant of engineers. How little humanity these servants have! As soon as the crisis is over, I will give her a walking ticket! I would much better have sent Juana, who, at least, hasn't any lover. . . .

"Do you feel worse, Maximina? A little tea would not do you any harm. . . . I will go and make it myself. . . . Courage!"

"You need it more than I, poor fellow!" said the young wife, smiling.

As he crossed the passage-way, the door-bell rang.

"At last!"

Deceived again! It was the Countess de Losilla, who came to offer her services "for everything." The young ladies did not come down for reasons easy to imagine.

"But, Rivera, how pale you are!"

"Señora, there is no small reason for it," he replied peevishly.

"But why, my son?" she demanded. "If there is no complication, as we have reason to hope, there is nothing more natural and harmless."

Miguel, in his turn, had to use strong efforts to repress his indignation. "Natural for me to have a son! How stupid the aristocracy are!" he said to himself.

Maximina received this visit gratefully, but with some feeling of embarrassment. The countess began to take the direction of affairs, like a consummate strategist, calmly and unhesitatingly giving every order.

From this moment Miguel remained entirely eclipsed; the maids paid absolutely no heed to him, and he found himself obliged to wander like a lost soul up and down the corridors. Once when he attacked Juana to bid her take the *tila* in a glass, and not in a cup, she told him to leave her in peace, that he knew nothing about such things. And he had to put up with it!

At last the midwife came. Miguel followed her, more dead than alive, to the room, but the countess shut the door in his face. Then after a little she opened it again, and by the smile on the face of all he saw that all was going well.

"Señorito, it is all right," said the *comadre.*

"What! is there no need of calling the doctor?"

"Not in the least, thank God! I will answer for it."

He became calm, as though a divinity had spoken from the clouds. But in the course of ten minutes he suddenly lost faith; that woman might be deceiving him or deceiving herself; who could have any confidence in such people? He cautiously approached the chamber, and said, putting his head in at the door: —

"It seems to me that I had better call in the doctor. . . . For safety's sake — nothing more," he added, timidly.

"As you please, señorito," replied the *comadre*, dryly, and with a scornful gesture.

"Rivera, for Heaven's sake! Haven't you heard her say that she would be responsible?" said the countess.

"Well, well, if she will be responsible," he replied, somewhat abashed. And then he asked with affected coolness: —

"How soon?"

The women all laughed aloud. The midwife replied in a condescending tone:—

"Señorito, don't worry. It will be when God wishes, and all will be well!"

He began to wander again like a shade through the corridors, not a little disgusted and anxious. The result was that every one found him ridiculous on this occasion and even laughed in his very face, and yet he could not persuade himself that it was right for him to intrust his happiness and his very life in the hands of an ignorant woman. He would have been more than glad to call a counsel of all the eminent physicians of the court. "If there is the least complication, I will choke her to death!" he said to himself, in a perfect fury. And with this consolatory threat he felt relieved.

After a little while his stepmother arrived, and she also immediately began to give orders. She was followed by the señora of the third floor, the wife of an employé of the Tribunal de la Rota.[1] Behind her came a maid bringing an enormous picture of San Ramón Nonnato, and this she placed in Maximina's room, with two lighted candles at the side of it. This lady likewise began to give directions as soon as she arrived. It really seemed as if everybody had the right to issue orders except the master of the house, toward whom all those ladies, and even the maid-servants, took delight in showing a profound and no less unjustified contempt.

"Why, however you look at it," he said to himself, with eminent truth, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking gloomy and annoyed, "I am the husband,

[1] *Rota de la Nunciatura Apostólica*, a supreme ecclesiastical court of last appeal in Spain, composed of judges nominated by the king and confirmed by the Pope.

and, besides, I am, or, at least, shall be, the . . . the . . . which is the same thing."

The poor fellow did not open his mouth unless to make some blunder, worthy at least of a disdainful smile.

Once, catching sight of his wife standing up and leaning on Juana and the *comadre*, it occurred to him to suggest that she would be better off in bed. The representatives of the female sex, like one body, fulminated such a terrible look at him that we cannot possibly explain why it did not reduce him to ashes. *La brigadiera,* striving to contain herself and soften her voice, said to him: —

"Miguel, you are disturbing us. I beg of you to leave us, and we will send for you in good time."

He obeyed in spite of himself: as he left the room he saw such a sad and loving look in his wife's eyes, that he was on the point of opening the door again and saying: —

"Ladies, see here! I am the master, this is my wife, and you depart whence you came!"

But he came to the conclusion that the dispute might annoy Maximina, and he swallowed his chagrin.

Now, absolutely condemned to ostracism in the corridors, he walked up and down in them for a long time, listening to all the noises in the bedroom. He was anxious to hear his wife's voice, even though it were in tones of anguish; but there was nothing: he could hear all the others, but not hers.

"How is it going?" he asked of the countess, who was starting for the kitchen.

"Very well, very well. Don't you be troubled."

An hour passed, and, worn out by his incessant walking up and down, he went to the parlor and threw himself upon a sofa. He sat there for some time, with his eyes wide open, trying to conquer the drowsiness that was tak-

ing possession of him in spite of himself. But at last he yielded: he stretched out his feet, settled his head comfortably, yawned tremendously, and soon was sleeping like a log.

It was broad daylight when three or four women precipitately invaded the parlor, shouting at the top of their voices: —

"Don Miguel! . . . Rivera! . . . Señorito!"

"What is the matter?" he cried, looking up in alarm.

"Nothing, except that you have a son! Come, come!"

And they pulled him with them to the chamber, where he saw his wife, still seated in an easy-chair, her face pale, but beaming with celestial happiness. At the same instant he saw Juana in one corner with a *something* in her hands that was squalling horribly! He could not bear to look at *it* for an instant, but turned his face to his wife and kissed her tenderly.

When Miguel left the room, his heart was in his mouth.

When he found himself alone he began to weep like a child.

"Poor little wife!" he murmured. "She suffered without a complaint, and there I was sleeping like a brute! I shall never forgive myself for such selfishness as long as I live! . . . Still, it was the fault of those women," he added, with a sudden wrath; "those meddlesome persons who drove me out of the room."

His remorse quickly subsided, and gave way to a thousand pleasant emotions of paternity. He wanted to go in a second time; but the women! always those women! — they blocked his way, saying that the infant was not yet washed and swaddled, or his wife put to bed.

When all this was accomplished, he went into her room; his wife was lovelier than ever as she lay in bed, with a

lace cap adorned with blue ribbons on her head, and wearing a clean white night-dress. He sat down at the head of the bed, and the two looked at each other in amazement; under the pretext of feeling of her pulse, he pressed her hand long and tenderly. *La brigadiera* then presented him a bundle of clothes, saying: —

"Here you have your son."

Miguel took the bundle and lifted it close to his eyes, and saw a little round red face without a nose, its eyes shut, and its forehead depressed, and from its comparatively enormous mouth issued sounds that were farthest from melodious.

"How ugly it is!" he said aloud.

A cry of indignation escaped from every one of the women, even his wife.

"What an atrocious thing to say, Rivera!" — "How can you imagine such a thing!" — "What makes you think that it is ugly, señorito?" — "It is certainly one of the loveliest babies that I ever saw, Rivera." — "Do you expect it at this time of its life to have perfect features?"

"Give it here, give it here!" said *la brigadiera*, snatching it from his hands.

"That is the kind of flowers that you give the poor little creature!"

"I should like to know what kind of a thing you were two hours after you were born, señorito," exclaimed Juana.

Miguel, not feeling any indignation at this lack of respect, replied: —

"Most beautiful!"

"How you must have changed for the worse since then!" retorted the countess, laughing.

"Not so very much, señora, not so very much; I am certain that my wife will quite agree with me."

"Not at all," said Maximina, making a face to express her vexation.

"Maximina!"

"Then why did you call him ugly?"

"I see that this young gentleman has wholly driven me out of my place!"

Meanwhile the bundle was passing from hand to hand, not without all the time emitting more and more energetic protests against such an unwelcome journey. But this same helpless desperation was the very thing that gave the most delight to those excellent women; they died with laughter to behold that poor little mouth open even to the throat, and that expressive and desperate waving of little hands filled with threats.

"Come, come! what lungs you have, child!"

"It is perfectly delightful! cheer up, man alive, cheer up! What a waste of genius, little pet!"

"What a monkey-face it makes when it cries!"

To tell the truth, it *was* horrible.

"Oh! it is stopping, señora! oh! it is stopping!" cried Plácida.

All the women gathered around it, in affright.

"What do you mean, *it is stopping?*" demanded Miguel, leaping from his chair.

"It has stopped crying, señorito!"

The baby, with its face drawn up and its mouth open, made no sound. The countess shook it with all her might till she almost murdered it: finally the infant emitted a scream more excruciating than ever, and all the women breathed a sigh of relief.

"Come now; we must give this little rascal to his mamma; if he does not get something to eat, he will be angry with us."

"How can that baby know enough to be angry?" thought Miguel.

They put it in the bed, and held its mouth to the maternal fount, but it refused, we cannot tell under what pretext, to take the breast, and this conduct the women found very extraordinary. Maximina looked at him with stern eyes, mentally giving him most terrible denunciations. The countess asked for sugar and water, and with that anointed the breast; then the child, won by this most delicate attention, no longer hesitated to yield to the desires of all the señoras, and began to suckle with little haste — like an apprentice, in fact — in the operation.

"Just see what a cunning little rascal he is!"

"*Ave Maria!* it seems incredible that it can have such a temper!"

"Such a thing as that you never saw in your life before, woman!"

"He is a perfect little villain!"

After this performance, the baby proposed to do all in his power to confirm this favorable opinion that had been formed of his genius. In fact he opened his right eye just the least wee bit, and immediately shut it again, to the great astonishment and delight of all present; then accidentally getting his own hand into his mouth, he began to suck at it with all his might. Not satisfied with this gallant exhibition of his talents, he proved it still more completely when Plácida put her finger into his mouth; in an instant he was furiously sucking at that also; but quickly becoming aware of the deception practised upon him, he became furiously angry, and gave it to be understood, with sufficient clearness, that whenever there was any attempt to lower his dignity, they would see him always protest in the same or similar fashion.

When he was put back into bed again, he fell asleep in a moment, and "slept like a bishop" (that was Juana's simile), while his mother from time to time lifted the

coverlid to look at him, with not only tenderness, but also childish curiosity. Miguel having rather carelessly leaned on the bed, she thought that he was going to hurt the child.

"Look out! look out!" she cried in choleric tone.

And she gave him such an indignant look that the young man was amazed, since it was beyond the power of his imagination to conceive those sweet eyes having such an expression.

Instead of being grieved, he began to laugh like a madman. Maximina was mortified, but smiled, and her innocent face regained the expression of lovely calm so peculiar to it.

Unfortunately, her calm was quickly disturbed in a most unexpected way. It happened that after the "bishop" had waked up, the feminine council conceived certain suspicions that his illustrious highness needed some attention, and an ocular inspection was forthwith ordered. The countess found that it was even as they had thought. Then with admirable grace and no little satisfaction she began to change the infant.

But at this juncture, *la brigadiera*, who had been steadily growing jealous of the countess for some time and had solemnly, though in an undertone, declared in the hearing of the maids that "that worthy señora was a tiresome busybody," now declared in a rather peevish tone that the bandage ought not to be put on as tight as the countess had put it on.

"Let me alone, Angela, let me alone! I know well enough how to do it," said the countess, with a certain accent of self-sufficiency, continuing in her task.

"But if it is left that way, the little thing won't be able to breathe, countess."

"There is no need of any one teaching me about dress-

ing infants: I have had six children, and, thank God, they are all alive in the world, safe and sound."

"Well, I have never had but one daughter, but I should never have consented for her to be swaddled in that way!"

"But I tell you that I do not need lessons from you, not in this nor in anything else. . . ."

The words which had passed were beginning to be very sharp, and the angry glances which the two ladies gave each other made it apparent that there would soon be a crisis. Those who were present at the scene grew very grave; Maximina, startled, looked as though she were going to cry. Then Miguel, vexed by the whole proceeding, interfered, saying, gently but firmly: —

"Ladies, please have some consideration for this poor girl, who now needs calm and rest."

The Countess de Losilla arose stiffly, handed the infant to a maid, and sailed out of the room, without saying a word. Miguel followed her, but in spite of all his entreaties, she utterly refused to return; on the other hand, her anger grew more and more violent as she went toward the door, and there she said "*adiós*" very curtly, and went up to her room, apparently with the intention of never coming down again.

"This mamma of mine always has to put her foot into it! What a lack of tact she has!" he exclaimed, when he was left alone.

But all his annoyance quickly vanished from his mind, owing to the happy and exceptional circumstances in which he found himself.

It was God's design, however, that a few drops of gall should be mingled in the cup of his happiness. In the evening, when, wearied by the commotion of the day, he was just preparing to go to bed, leaving Plácida to watch

with his wife, he heard an importunate ring at the door-bell.

"Señorito, there is a gentleman here who is anxious to speak with you."

"Confound the impertinent visit! Have you shown him into the study?"

"Yes, señorito."

Our new papa went there, taking his own time, and perfectly resolved that it should not be a long call. But on entering the study, he had a not altogether agreeable surprise in finding Eguiburu, the "white horse" of *La Independencia.*

The relationship which he enjoyed with this gentleman was not very intimate. Since he had given his endorsement, guaranteeing the thirty thousand duros which had been spent on the newspaper, he had seen him only twice, to receive from his hand two sums amounting to twelve thousand, which had not been wholly spent on the paper, but had also been used in assisting the *emigrados*. This unseasonable visit therefore reminded him of these things, and made him anxious and suspicious.

Eguiburu was a tall, lean man, with pale and wrinkled face, small blue eyes, thinnish red hair, and very inelegant in his whole person. The clothes that he wore — tight-fitting trousers of black serge, large vest, and an enormous gray overcoat reaching to his very heels — did not tend to give any additional elegance to his appearance.

Miguel greeted him courteously and gravely, and asked him to what he owed the honor of his visit. . . .

"Señor de Rivera," said Eguiburu, unceremoniously taking a chair — Miguel, in his surprise, having neglected to ask him to do so — "it happens that now for several months you have been in power. . . ."

"Hold on, my friend; there is no one in Spain further from being in power than I. . . . I am not even under-secretary."

"Well, well; when I say 'you,' I mean your friends; they all at the present time occupy great positions: the Count de Ríos, ambassador; Señor Mendoza has just been elected deputy. . . ."

"And do you think of comparing me, an insignificant pigmy, with the Count de Ríos and Mendoza, two stars of the first magnitude in Spanish politics?"

"Now, see here; Señor de Rivera, to tell the truth, the other night in the Levante Café, Señor de Mendoza was not spoken well of, even by his own friends."

"What did they say?"

"They said, — begging your pardon, — that he was light as a cork."

"Those are the calumnies of the envious. Don't imagine, friend Eguiburu, that statesmen are made of such stuff."

"I am very glad that such is the case, señor. But the truth is that, in spite of their talents and the positions that they hold, neither the Señor Conde de Ríos nor Mendoza are remembering to make good to me the money that I have been spending for them."

"Have you spoken to them?"

"I have written a letter to each of them. Mendoza did not reply; the Señor Conde, after the lapse of considerable time, tells me in a letter, which I have with me, and you can see, 'that the very serious political duties that weigh upon him do not permit him at present to attend to such things as these, which have for some time been intrusted to his former private secretary, Señor Mendoza y Pimentel.' Of course, as you very well know, I have no need of begging from door to door for what

is my own. And so, without further delay, I have come directly to you."

"Why did you not go to Mendoza first?"

Eguiburu hung his head, and began to twirl his hat; at the same time he smiled much as a marble statue might have done if it had the power.

"Señor de Mendoza seems to me to have very little flesh for my claws!"

On hearing these words, and seeing the smile that accompanied them, Miguel felt a chill run down his back, and he made no reply. At the end of a few moments he looked up, and said in a firm voice: —

"In other words, you have come to dun me for those thirty thousand duros! Is that so?"

"I feel it in my soul, Señor de Rivera . . . be convinced that I really do . . . for it is certainly not to be gainsaid that you have not *eaten them*."

"Thanks! you have a sensitive spirit, and I congratulate you on it. Unfortunately I cannot reciprocate this delicacy of feelings by handing over the thirty thousand duros."

"Very well; but you will hand them over!"

"Have you any security for it?"

Eguiburu lifted his head, and fixed his little blue eyes on Miguel, who looked at him in a cool and hostile manner.

"Yes, señor," he replied.

"Then I congratulate you again; I did not know that you could have it."

"Don't you remember, Señor de Rivera," said the banker, with amiability exaggerated in order to palliate the unpleasant effect that his words were about to produce, "I have here a paper endorsed with your name?"

And as he said this he raised his hand to his overcoat pocket.

Again Miguel kept silence. At the end of a few moments he spoke in a voice in which could be detected anger scarcely repressed: —

"That is to say, Señor de Eguiburu, that you propose nothing else than to ruin me on account of a debt, which, as is evident to you, I have not contracted."

"I propose merely to make sure of my money."

"That is all right," said Miguel, in a choking voice; "to-morrow I will write to the Count de Ríos, and will also see Mendoza; I should like to know if the count is capable of leaving me in the lurch. . . . If that should be so, then we will see what is to be done."

After these words there was a period of embarrassed silence. Eguiburu twisted his hat, looking askance at Miguel, who kept his eyes fastened on the floor, while his lips showed an almost imperceptible tremor, which did not escape the banker's notice.

"There is one way, Señor de Rivera," he suggested timidly, "by which you can get out of the difficulty in which you find yourself, and still have time to obtain from the count and the other friends the fulfilment of their obligations. . . . If you will guarantee me the money which I have since spent on the newspaper, I shall be perfectly willing to wait. . . . I am sorry to put the pistol to the heart of a person for whom I have so high a regard, but . . ."

Miguel remained motionless, with his eyes cast down, and thinking deeply; then suddenly standing up, he said: —

"Well, we will see how this affair turns out. I will speak to-morrow with Mendoza, and immediately let you know the result of my interview, and of my letter to the count."

Eguiburu likewise arose, and with exquisite amiability

offered Rivera his hand in farewell. Miguel shook hands, and looking at him keenly, while a derisive smile hovered over his lips, he said: —

"Are you very anxious for those thirty thousand duros?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because I should be grieved if you were very much set upon them, while on the eve of losing them forever."

"Explain yourself!" said the banker, growing serious.

"Nothing, man; but if I should not get the money from the Conde de Ríos, what I have . . ."

"Hey! What is that you say?"

"That I should never in the world be able to pay for it, for the two houses which constitute my fortune are mortgaged. . . ."

Eguiburu became terribly pale.

"You could not mortgage them because I have your endorsement for an obligation: the mortgage is null."

"They were mortgaged long before the endorsement."

The banker passed his hand over his forehead in despair; then straightening up quickly, and giving Rivera a crushing look, he stammered —

"Tha-that is . . . a p-piece of rascality. . . . I will have you up in c-court as a swindler."

Miguel burst into a laugh, and laying his hand familiarly on the man's shoulder, he said: —

"That gave you a good scare, didn't it? Now I am somewhat repaid for the one that you just gave me."

"But what the deuce does this mean? . . ."

"Calm yourself; my houses are not mortgaged. You will have the pleasure of ruining me on the day least expected," replied the young man, with bitter irony.

The symptom of a smile seemed to be coming into Eguiburu's face, but it suddenly vanished again: —

"Are you in earnest?"

"Yes, man, yes; don't have any apprehension."

Then the smile that had vanished once more appeared, insinuating and benevolent, on the money lender's lips."

"What a joker you are, Señor de Rivera! No one can ever tell whether you are in earnest or joking."

"Then you are certainly very wrong to be so calm at this moment."

Eguiburu grew serious again: —

"No! I cannot believe that you would jest on matters so . . . so . . ."

"So sacred, you mean?"

"That is it — so sacred."

"However, you will confess that you haven't the papers with you."

"Certainly not; you are a talented man . . . and a perfect gentleman besides. . . ."

"Come now; don't flatter me; there is no need of it."

They went to the door, talking as they went. Eguiburu felt an anxiety that he tried in vain to hide; he gave his hand three or four times to Rivera; his face and attitude changed more than a score of times, and when Miguel told him to put on his hat, he placed it, all twisted and rumpled, on the back of his head. He tried to change the conversation to prove that he was perfectly convinced of the good word of his surety. He asked him with much interest about his wife and the baby, taking great pains to inquire about the details of the occurrence. Nevertheless, when he was already on the stairway, and Miguel was just about to close the door, he asked in an indifferent and jovial tone, and yet betraying keen anxiety: —

"Then that was merely a joke, was it, Rivera?"

"Have no anxiety about it, man!" replied Miguel, laughing.

But as soon as he was left alone, the laugh died on his lips; he stood for a moment with his fingers on the latch; then he went with slow step back to his study, sat down at the table, and leaned his head on his hand, with his eyes covered. Thus he sat a long time in thought. When he got up, they were swollen and red as though he had slept too long. He went to his wife's room; as he passed through the corridor he felt a little chill.

She was still awake. Beside the bed a cot had been placed for Plácida.

"Who was your visitor?" she asked.

"It was no consequence; a man came to speak with me about the paper."

There must have been something peculiar in Miguel's voice in making this simple reply, for his wife looked at him anxiously for some time. To free himself from this scrutiny, he went on to say: —

"How rested I am; I had a nap."

He kissed her forehead, then lifted the spread, contemplated for a moment his sleeping son, and touched his lips to the little head; then he kissed his wife again, and left the room. When he went to bed he shivered, and nevertheless felt that his cheeks were on fire.

For a long time he lay in bed, with his eyes wide open and the lamp lighted. A throng of melancholy thoughts passed through his mind; a thousand forebodings and fears attacked him. Like all men of keen imagination, he leaped to the worst conclusions; he saw himself ruined, obliged with his wife to leave the social circles in which they had been accustomed to move: he also remembered his son.

"My poor boy!" he exclaimed.

And he was on the point of sobbing; but he made a manly effort to control himself, saying: —

"'No! weep for lost money? Such things are done only by fools and misers. A man who has a wife like mine, and a son such as she has just given me, has no right to ask anything more of God. I am young; I have good health; if worse comes to worst, I can work for them."

As he murmured these words, he gave a violent puff to the light, and had sufficient self-control to calm himself, and was soon asleep.

XVII.

On the following morning, as soon as he was dressed, and after spending by his wife's side a much shorter time than circumstances required, he left the house and hastened to Mendoza's.

Mendoza at this time was lodging at one of the best and most central hotels of Madrid. When Miguel reached there, he was still asleep. Nevertheless, he went to his room, and took it upon himself to open the shutters like a friend whose familiarity was limitless.

"*Holá!* I see that you sleep just the same as when you were not a great man."

Mendoza rubbed his eyes, and looked at him in amazement.

"What does this mean, Miguelito? Why so early in the morning?"

"My dear Perico, the first thing that you must do is to get rid of this condescending tone. When there are people present, I am perfectly willing for you to condescend, and I will call you 'most illustrious lordship' if you like; but when we are alone, just remember that I am not your vassal."

"You are always just the same, Miguel," replied Mendoza, a little exasperated.

"That is the advantage that you have over me: I am always the same; you are always changing and playing a new and brilliant rôle in society. I am satisfied, however, with mine — so satisfied that the fear of having to be different is what brings me here so early in the morning to disturb your dreams of glory."

"What do you mean?"

"That having up to the present time been considered a person 'well fixed,' or, to use the expressions affected by us literary fellows, being an Hidalgo of 'ancient stock,' and having 'five hundred *sueldos* guerdon,' I — but you don't know what this means?"

"No!" replied Mendoza, with an impatient gesture.

"Well, it is very simple. If you should give me a slap (which I am sure you will not), I should get 'five hundred *sueldos* guerdon,' or fine. On the other hand, if I should give you one (which is perfectly possible), there would be no need of your spending a sou. . . . Well then, having up to the present time played this rôle in society, I should feel it to the bottom of my soul to be obliged to try that of the poverty-stricken or the vagabond, which I have never studied."

"I don't understand you."

"I am coming to the point. Last evening Eguiburu presented himself at my house, and without any preamble demanded of me the thirty thousand duros which have been spent on *La Independencia*, and which I guaranteed, yielding to your entreaties. . . . Do you understand now?"

Brutandor said nothing for several moments, remaining in an attitude of meditation; then he said, with the solemn deliberation which characterized all his remarks: —

"I believe this amount should be paid, not by you, but by the Count de Rios."

"Ah! you think so, do you? Then I am saved. As soon as Eguiburu knows this opinion, I am certain that he will not venture to ask a *cuarto* of me."

"If it were taken from you, it would be robbery."

"I am delighted to see that the immutable principles of natural law have not vanished from your mind. But you know that the actual law is on his side; and if, perchance, it should enter into his head to make use of law instead of equity, I want to know if you would have the heart to let him ruin me."

Miguel had grown very serious, and looked at his friend with that cold and hard expression which was always in his case a sign of repressed anger. Mendoza dropped his eyes, in confusion.

"I should feel very sorry to have any misfortune happen to you, Miguel."

"The question now is not about your feelings. What I want to know this instant is, if the general is ready to pay this sum."

"I think that the general has no other desire. . . ."

"Nor is the question about the general's desires. I want to know — do you hear? — I want to know if he will pay the thirty thousand duros, or will not pay them."

"I shall have to write him: you know he is in Germany just now."

"The point is, that if he does not pay it, I will take it into court. I have letters from him acknowledging the debt," said Miguel, striding in a state of excitement up and down the room.

Mendoza allowed him to do so for some time, and then replied: —

"It seems to me, Miguel, that you ought not to be in

too great a hurry to do this or look on the dark side; you won't get ahead any that way."

"What makes you say that?" retorted the brigadier's son, halting.

"You would get nothing by taking it to court."

"Why so?"

"Because the general has no fortune: all that he has is in his wife's name."

Miguel's eyes flamed with anger.

"The villain!" he muttered under his breath; and then added: "I shall be convinced that you are as vile as he."

"Miguel, for God's sake!"

"That is what I have said. Take it as you like. I am glad that it looks worse for him."

Mendoza had no wish nor courage to reply. He let him continue his walking up and down, in the hope that his anger would calm down, and in this he showed how well he knew his man. In fact, in a few minutes he shrugged his shoulders, paused near the bed, and throwing his hands on Mendoza's shoulders with a loving gesture, he said, laughing: —

"I have been unfair. I had forgotten that you were too much of a rough diamond to be a villain."

Mendoza was not annoyed by this singular apology.

"You are so quick-tempered, Miguel, that when one least thinks about it, you 'leave a man without the blood in his veins.'"

"It would be worse to leave one without any money."

"Man alive! you haven't lost it yet. I have no doubt that the matter will be settled all right."

"Do you know what plan Eguiburu proposed to me?"

"No; what?"

"That I should also guarantee the twelve thousand

duros which he has furnished besides, and then he will wait."

Mendoza made no reply. Both remained lost in thought.

"That does not seem to me such a bad plan," said the former, at length. "I tell you frankly that at present it is impossible to get the thirty thousand duros from the general; I know his affairs well, and am certain that he is not in a situation to pay down this amount. But if it does not come from his private pocket, it may be got from the public treasury. I have it on good authority that the government has already voted some money (though not any such sum as this), to be spent on newspapers, and credited to the secret funds of the Ministry of the Government. The point here is to get influence enough for the minister to get hold of it."

"I suppose that the general will use all his."

"Of course. And I will do what I can. But the general is not in Madrid, and you know as well as I do that these delicate transactions cannot be managed through correspondence, or arranged in this way, ever. We must be always on the track, worry the minister with visits, speak to all his friends, so as to keep it before his attention, and, if it were possible, threaten him with some summons to the Cortes concerning some delicate affair which he would not like to have made public."

"*Caramba!* Perico, you have made great advances in short time. You understand wire-pulling to the last detail."

"How so?"

"Man alive! certainly; for it is not this way that it is explained and defined to us by the treatises."

Mendoza shrugged his shoulders, at the same time pressing his lips into a sign of disdain.

"Well, then you want to bring the general back to Madrid?" added Miguel.

"That is impossible."

"Then what shall we do?"

Mendoza meditated.

"If you had been elected deputy, the thing would be much easier. In that case we should be two to ask the minister, who, looking out for his future interests, would be much more careful not to go counter to us. . . ."

"But as I am not a deputy!"

Mendoza meditated another long time, and said: —

"Still it can all be arranged. The general, when he accepted the post of ambassador, left one district vacant, that of Serín, in Galicia. They will soon be having the second elections. If the government will accept you as *candidato adicto*, you are certain of a triumph."

Rivera said nothing, and seemed also lost in thought.

"Hitherto, Perico, I have never had the least idea of being the father of my country. You know well that I am of no good for kicking my heels in the ante-chambers of ministers, that I am not one to suffer impertinences and scorn, nor have I the talent for manœuvring plots, nor the audacity for meddling in dark intrigues. I am so constituted that a cool look wounds me, a discourteous word annoys me, any disloyalty crushes and overwhelms me. I am incapable of giving my word and not fulfilling it; I have not sufficient calmness to keep cool when brought into contact with the sympathy and love, or the aversion, which men inspire in me. I get excited and lose my head with excessive ease, and under the influence of anger I speak out the first word that comes into my mind, however dangerous it is. Moreover, I have the misfortune of always seeing the comic side of things, and I have not sufficient strength of mind to repress myself and to refrain from saying what I think. Politicians, when they are not knaves worthy of jail, seem to me,

with a few honorable exceptions, a herd of vulgar, ignorant men who have taken up this occupation as the easiest and most lucrative; many of them village intriguers who come to repeat in Congress the same trickeries which they have been practising in the *Ayuntamiento* [1] or the *Diputación;* [2] others, men who have failed in literature, the sciences, and the arts, and not getting there the notoriety that they crave, seek it in the more accessible field of politics: a young man whose drama has been hissed off the stage; another, who has tried five or six times in vain to get a professorship; another, who has written various books that remain virgins and martyrs on the publishers' shelves, — these are the ones who, making their way into the Hall of Congress, where no one is judged by his merits, and rallying under the standard of some personage who began as they did, climb to lofty destinies, and as time goes on, come to regulate the affairs of the nation. . . . But I have become too serious," he added, lowering his voice and smiling. "The principal argument that I bring up against dedicating myself to political life, — I will tell it to you as a secret, — is, that I detest it; I detest it from the bottom of my heart. Nevertheless, as I am threatened with ruin, I am determined to enter it to restore my fortunes, which I was foolish enough to compromise."

Brutandor looked at him with wide-opened eyes: any one can imagine, knowing the tendency of his mind, that Miguel spoke a language entirely incomprehensible to him.

When he ended, the newly elected deputy imperceptibly shrugged his shoulders and puckered his mouth into that look very common to him, one that made it hard to

[1] *Ayuntamiento,* municipal council in Spanish towns.
[2] *Diputación provincial,* district assembly.

tell whether it meant indifference or disdain or surprise or resignation. Miguel used to maintain that his friend Mendoza was able to understand only eleven things in this world: when anything distinct from the eleven was said, instead of answering, he made the face spoken of, and gave it to be understood that there the matter ended.

"Well," said he, noticing that face, "to do this you must introduce me to the government ministry."

"I will introduce you to the President of the Council. I am better acquainted with him than with Escalante."

"I am glad of that, for Escalante is not congenial to me, and at all events I don't know the President. Do you want to go this afternoon to the Presidency?"

Mendoza looked at him in amazement.

"But don't you know that I am going to speak to-day in Congress?"

"Forgive me, dear fellow; I don't know a single word about it. And what are you going to speak about?"

"About tariff reform. It is the first speech that I shall have made. Hitherto I have only put inquiries."

"Don't be so modest, Perico; I happen to know that you have presented a report concerning the citizens of Valdeorras, without flinching or anything coming of it."

"Don't you laugh; the danger to-day is very serious."

"Terrible! . . . Especially for the taxes. . . . And when are you to be married?"

Mendoza looked down and flushed.

"On the fifteenth."

"I am delighted that you are entering into the good path," said Miguel, noticing Mendoza's mortification, and generously trying to spare him.

"Come, get up, man; it is already almost eleven o'clock."

"You will breakfast with me, won't you?"

"My dear fellow, you must know that to-day is an exceptional day for me!"

"Of course I know it; but then we will go together to Congress; and perhaps, if the session is over in time, we might go to the presidency."

This last suggestion pleased Miguel, because he saw clearly that his thirty thousand duros depended on the influence that he might gain over. After thinking a little, he said: —

"Very well; I will send a message to my wife, so that she will not be worried."

He sat down at Mendoza's table, while the latter was dressing, and dashed off a few lines to Maximina. While writing them, he could not help saying in a tone of grief: —

"Strange circumstances that oblige me to leave my wife alone on the day after she has presented me with a son! Nevertheless, it is for her and for him that I do it. If I were a bachelor, it would not make much difference if I were ruined."

After he was dressed, and before they went down into the dining-room, Mendoza showed his friend the jewels that he was going to present to his "future." They were magnificent and in the latest style. Miguel praised them as they deserved, at the same time wondering where Perico had got the money to buy them; and though he was much tempted to ask him, he had the delicacy not to do so.

Then they went down to a private room on the *entresol* floor, where Brutandor was in the habit of breakfasting alone. The waiter served them a remarkably fine breakfast, among other things, Burgundy and champagne *frappé* for dessert.

"This is extravagant, Perico," he said. "The next time I shall forbid your treating me in such style."

"The señorito always breakfasts like this," said the waiter, smiling with evident satisfaction.

"*Holá!*" exclaimed Miguel, in surprise. "Who could have believed, Perico, that those heavy leaders that you used to write in *La Independencia* would have been so quickly coined into oysters, fillets of veal, and Burgundy!"

Brutandor dropped his head, and there are reasons for belief that the precursory symptoms of a smile appeared in his face. However, if any one should be inclined to deny it, there would not fail to be arguments in support of such an opinion. Mendoza's smiles always gave room for dispute.

After breakfast they betook themselves to Congress, not, however, without the Amphitryon first hurrying up to his room, and bringing down a package of documents, which proved to be notes for his speech.

"*María Santísima!*" cried Miguel. "How calm and undisturbed are the poor deputies who at this moment are without a thought of the coming earthquake!"

They arrived in altogether too good season. There were but few people in the *salón* and the lobbies. Mendoza went to join a group of personages, grave and solemn like himself, and began to talk with them. When one spoke, the others maintained a courteous silence; there might be some question, however, whether they listened very attentively, but there was no room for doubt that each one listened to himself with perfect delight. Miguel joined a group of journalists where tumultuous gayety reigned.

When it was time for the session to begin, he went with them to the reporters' gallery, which in a short time was crowded. Almost all the faces to be seen there were young, and such a babel of voices and disorder constantly prevailed there that it was difficult to hear.

In vain the ushers, with a familiarity that anywhere else would have been called insolence, warned and even threatened them; the reporters paid no attention to their menaces, and when they deigned to listen, it was merely to reply with some bloodthirsty witticism: if the usher at last became really angry, there was sure to be some one who would take the wind out of his sails by throwing his arms around his neck, and promising him promotion "as soon as he came to be minister."

Some amused themselves by sharpening pencils; others, by cutting up paper into pads; others drew out from between vest and shirt enormous writing-tablets: one would think that it was an orchestra beginning to tune up. Settling themselves into absurd attitudes, they all talked, shouted, laughed, fired repartees at each other, and made witty remarks about the deputies who were now coming into the large and elegant *salón*, and casting sheep's-eyes at them, or rather the eyes of dying lambs asking mercy. As a general thing, these were the rural members. Those who lived in Madrid always had some acquaintances among the journalists, and to these they made signs and winks from below, and sometimes sent caramels, to which the reporters would respond with rhymed notes.

"Look here, my dear; do you know what uniform the sub-governors are going to wear?"

"The sub-governors won't have anything else than a sub-uniform," replied a sufficiently ill-favored reporter named Inza. This same Inza, who was in one corner arranging his pad, shortly after remarked: —

"Ah, here comes Alonso Ramírez enveloped in the skins of his clients."

The famous lawyer just at that moment came in, wearing a magnificent overcoat trimmed with fur.

This jest has since that time been credited to a politician by his friends, and they would be quite capable of claiming that he wrote the Holy Bible, if they felt like it.

Keen sallies passed from one to another in loud tones, and caused hearty laughter, and stimulated the victim to sharpen his wits so as to reply with some other joke still more piquante. Much talent and still more jollity were wasted in that incommodious gallery.

"Do you know, Juanito, that you are losing your wits?" cried one young man to another.

"What can I do about it, man; for a week ago the chief sent me to the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences?"

From time to time hot disputes came up on subjects most absurd or foreign to the profession of the disputant; for instance, about the method of loading needle-guns or driving carriages.

And they would gabble and get angry until the ushers compelled them to stop, or some opportune joke from a comrade would bring them to their senses.

The President mounted his lofty seat; instantly he was surrounded by a group of deputies, to whom he began with paternal solicitude to offer an abundant supply of caramels.

These caramels, which at that time did not cost the State more than five hundred duros a day, are an institution, the history of which has unfortunately been very much neglected. Nothing more useful can be imagined than to study the vicissitudes through which it has passed, the beneficent influence which these sweetmeats have exercised on the government of our people, and the elements of progress which they have carried with them. Its whole history might be compassed in three small volumes of easy and agreeable reading.

When they were through, or when the President no longer cared to give any more, the deputies went to their seats, and the session was opened. The first person to get the floor was an ancient republican of pale complexion, dull eyes, and a great shock of hair which made him look like the images in our churches. He got up to speak of an insurrection that had been started in Cadiz. The subject was of keen interest, and there was a great curiosity in Congress to hear this gentleman's remarks, as he was supposed to be one of the promoters of the revolution. He began in these words, or to the same effect: —

"In the primitive times of history man wandered naked through the forests, supporting life with the fruit of trees, and the milk and flesh of animals which he hunted. One day he saw an animal like himself passing through the woods. He flung his lasso and caught it. It proved to be — a woman. Hence the family, *señores diputados*. . . ."

He went on giving a complete though succinct sketch of universal history, and explained to the minutest details the theories of the social contract. He quoted numerous texts from the wise men of ancient and modern times in support of his own theories. Attention was attracted above all by one proposition of bold originality, and as it was received with murmurs by the assembly, the deputy exclaimed: —

What! does this surprise you? But it is not I that say it. Brígida says it."

"Who is Brígida?" asked a journalistic tyro.

"His housekeeper," replied another, without looking up.

"Why! what a ridiculous thing to quote his housekeeper here!" exclaimed the first.

The deputies received with renewed murmurs the name of the author of the quotation.

"Brígida says it," cried the orator with all the force of his lungs.

Louder and longer murmurs. When quiet was restored, he said in a grave and solemn tone: —

"Santa Brígida says so!"

"Ahaaaaaa!" replied the assembly.

The last five minutes were devoted to the events in Cadiz, and that was to say that it was all the fault of the government.

It seems logical to report that the orator was removed from there in a cage and taken to a mad-house. Nothing of the sort happened, however: the minister replied in all formality, and combated his quotations and theories with other quotations and other theories. At that period all addresses began with Adam and no one was surprised at it.

Next, coming to the order of the day, it was the turn of tariff reform, and Mendoza was granted the floor. He, having spread out on his desk his earthquake of notes, coughing three or four times, lifting up his hands an equal number, began his great oration.

His voice was well modulated, clear, and mellow; his tone grave and high-sounding; his gestures noble and refined. Neither Demosthenes, nor Cicero, nor Mirabeau were blessed with such an effective presence and such an elegant round of attitudes as our friend Brutandor.

But the trouble was that the ideas that proceeded from his mouth did not correspond in the least with such attitudes. That wrathful gesture, that lowering and raising of the voice, and those short but quick steps in front of his desk, were very appropriate to accompany the celebrated "Tell your master that only by the force of bayonets will we be taken from this spot," or the *Quousque tandem Catilina;* but for saying that the annual con-

sumption of cotton in England in 1767 was 4,000,000 pounds, and that in 1867 it was more than 1,400,000,000 pounds; that the number of workmen engaged there in the manufacture of cotton is 500,000, and 4,000,000 the persons whose living depends on this industry; that the value of the paper manufactured in 1835 was 80,000,000 pounds and in 1860 exceeded 223,000,000; that the manufactories of the said product at the present time numbered 394; that in France its production exceeded 25,000,000 kilograms, etc.,—they did not seem so appropriate. His whole discourse was reduced to this: quantities, dates, facts. The deputies, with more or less dissimulation, began to desert the salon, one after the other.

"This orator is an air-pump," said one reporter. "At this rate there will soon be a perfect vacuum."

The jokes and flings in the press-gallery became general. Miguel, who knew what he had to expect from his friend's genius, listened with disgust to their raillery of him: he was anxious, and somewhat inclined to cut short their jests peremptorily; but, as in that tribunal of Liberty, comment on the speeches was traditional, he did his best to restrain himself. The best thing that occurred to him, in order to avoid being compromised, was to make a hurried visit home and find out how his wife was. When he returned, the orator was still speaking.

"Now, Congress is about to see the most curious thing of all," said the worthy Brutandor.

And, on turning round to gather up from his desk the papers on which it was written, he showed the seat of his trousers! But no one noticed this graceful *quid pro quo* except Miguel and a shorthand reporter, who could not help laughing.

The joking continued among the reporters; the obser-

vations, however, were made more with the purpose of causing a laugh than of hurting the feelings of the orator, whom almost all knew or were intimate with. Only one, the editor of a Carlist daily, from time to time got off serious criticisms in bad taste, as though he had some personal ill-will against Mendoza. Miguel had already looked at this man two or three times in an aggressive manner, without the other taking any notice of it. At last, accosting him, Miguel said: —

"See here, friend; I am not surprised that the numbers of *El Universo* are so stupid! You evidently take pains to waste all your wit here."

"What you just said to me seems to me an intentional insult, sir!"

"Perhaps."

"You will immediately give me an apology," said the journalist, very much disturbed.

"No; I should much prefer to give you some unpleasantness by and by," replied Miguel, with a smile.

Then the editor of *El Universo* took his hat and went out in great indignation. In a short time, two Catholic deputies made their appearance in the gallery, asking for Miguel.

"You have come to ask me to make an apology, have you? Then I tell you that I shall not make one. Come to an understanding with these two friends of mine."

And he introduced those whom he had selected. The Catholic editor's seconds had not come so primed for a bellicose decision: after consulting a few moments with Miguel's, they went down to ask further instructions of their principal; then returned in a short time with the calumet of peace in their hands, saying that 'their friend's religious principles did not allow him to settle insults with weapons.'

On hearing this, there was an explosion of laughter in the gallery.

"Then, if his religious principles do not allow him to fight," said Miguel, irritated, "there was no reason for him to choose seconds. But it seems as if this gentleman wished to try his fortune."

At last, Mendoza finished his oration with three deputies in the hall, one of them snoring. This, however, did not prevent the papers on the following day declaring that he was a man "most skilled in financial matters."

When Miguel went to congratulate him, he was sweating copiously but calm and serene as a god, surrounded by all the members of the committee of Estimates.

They left Congress together, and went for refreshments to the Café de la Iberia. After chatting there for some time, Miguel doing most of the talking (for we know of old that Mendoza was not the man to waste his breath foolishly), the latter got up, saying: —

"Well, Miguelito, excuse me if I leave you; I have a few things to attend to."

Rivera's eyes expressed surprise and indignation.

"Your glory has spoiled your memory, Perico. Hadn't we agreed to see the President after the session?"

"That is a fact: I had forgotten," replied Mendoza, without being able to repress a motion of vexation and disgust. "I don't know as this is — it is pretty near dinner time. . . ."

Miguel, who had not failed to notice his gesture, said with characteristic impetuosity: —

"Look here, do you imagine that I lamentably wasted two hours hearing you quote data to be found in any statistical annual merely for the pleasure of doing so? . . . I never believed that your egotism was carried to such a degree. You see me within a hand's-breadth of ruin, for

your sake, only for your sake, and instead of using all your powers to save me, in doing which you would be merely fulfilling your duty, you manifest Olympian indifference; you aren't even willing to put yourself out to go with me from here to the Presidency. That is unworthy, shameful! I have excused many things in my life, Perico; but this goes beyond bounds."

Rivera, in saying these words, trembled with indignation.

"Don't be so explosive man! why, I have not yet refused to go with you to the Presidency, or anywhere else," said Mendoza, laying his hand on his shoulder, while his lips were curved by that humble smile which Miguel compared to that of "a Newfoundland dog." "Come on! let us go this very moment to the Presidency!"

"Come on, then," said Rivera dryly, getting up.

After going a few steps his vexation subsided.

When they reached there, the President had not yet come in. Mendoza, as a deputy, made his way immediately into the office, and there they both waited, taking a comfortable seat on a sofa while the throng of office-hunters were spoiling in the anteroom. It was not long before there was the sound of a carriage under the *porte cochère:* instantly all the bells in the house began to jingle madly.

"Here comes the President," said Mendoza.

Indeed, in a few seconds he came into the office, accompanied by a number of deputies. Seeing Mendoza, he greeted him in the free and easy tone with which he greeted the friends who came every day.

"Well worked up, my dear Mendoza, well worked up. It has produced a very good effect."

He alluded to the speech.

Mendoza, instead of being embarrassed by the great-

ness of the personage before whom he stood, replied in the same familiar and fluent tone. This self-possession did not fail to impress Miguel; for he, being more accustomed to social intercourse, could not help feeling some emotion of respect before the man who held the reins of government.

The President was about fifty years old: he was fair and pale, with regular, and not unpleasing, features; the only thing that disfigured his face was a row of huge teeth, which were apt to be uncovered when he smiled; and this he did frequently, not to say incessantly.

"I present my friend, Miguel Rivera, who is now the actual editor of *La Independencia*."

"I have heard of this gentleman. I am very, very glad to make your acquaintance, Señor Rivera," said the President, shaking hands with exceeding amiability. "You will excuse me a moment, will you not?" he added, touching them both on the shoulder; "I have to speak a few words with these gentlemen. . . . I will be with you in an instant."

The instant was about half an hour. Miguel had been growing impatient. But the President's courteous reception made him feel better, and inclined him to pardon the delay.

"There," said he, after taking leave of the other gentlemen, "now I am at your service. What can I do for you, friend Mendoza?"

"I wanted to know if you have come to any decision about the district of Serín?"

"What district is that: the one left by General Ríos?" he asked, for a moment ceasing to smile, and fixing his eyes on the window.

"Yes, sir."

"We have not as yet given any thought to the vacant

districts. The second elections will not take place for two months at least."

"My friend Rivera, here, has conceived the idea of presenting himself for that district in case the government should favor it."

"There is some little time yet; still you would do well to begin making your arrangements. . . . But, friend Mendoza, you are a 'well of science'!" he added, jocularly, not making it at all evident whether he spoke ironically or not. "Ah! that was a meaty discourse that you gave us this afternoon!"

Brutandor inclined his head, and did his best to smile.

"I am not going to be ceremonious with you, gentlemen, for you are friends. Come and take dinner with me, and then we can talk with greater comfort and ease."

And he showed them into a private room where there was a table spread. Neither Mendoza nor Miguel accepted his invitation, but the latter appreciated this kindly hospitality.

The President began his meal, more than once deploring that his friends would not join him; he kept growing more and more expansive and genial with Mendoza, and he overwhelmed Miguel with refined and delicate attentions, now speaking in the terms of warmest eulogy of his father, whom he had known, and now calling to mind some good article in *La Independencia;* again, asking with lively interest into the details of his life: if he were married, and how long since? where had he studied? what was he doing? etc., etc. He related to them various lively anecdotes, and made some droll sketches of some dead politicians whom he had known in times gone by; of those who were alive he always spoke with sufficient consideration, even though they were in the opposition. Suddenly interrupting himself, he asked:—

"Isn't it true, Señor Rivera, that the President of the Council is a trifle impudent?"

"It used to be said that Richelieu also was," replied Miguel, with a bow.

"I feel that I have his defects, and not his qualities. You can imagine how I envy those reserved, polite, prudent men . . . like our friend Mendoza here!"

Again it was difficult to tell whether the head of the government were speaking seriously.

"I do not; it would be depriving myself of one of the greatest pleasures of life."

"I agree with you; but it costs the most of all."

And in this connection he related several cases where by frankly saying what he thought, it had caused him serious losses. His conversation was gay, insinuating, without the least snobbishness; his fault lay, on the contrary, in excessive familiarity.

When he had finished eating, he courteously offered cigars, and after lighting one and leaning back in his chair, he asked Rivera: —

"So, then, you wish to be deputy for Serín?"

"If you have no opposition to it. . . ."

"I? Why should I have any opposition to it? It is sufficient that you are Brigadier Rivera's son and Mendoza's friend. Besides, no election could be more suitable than yours. You are a young man of talent, as has already been proved; you belong to the democratic wing of the party, and that composes a very respectable contingent in it; you have an independent fortune . . . on men like you the heads of the government ought to have great reliance, and ought to win them over at all hazards. We like young men of intelligence, and with a future ahead of them; rising stars! As for those that are declining, let them have a feather-bed to rest in! That is public life."

He remained a few moments pensive; puffed at his cigar, and added: —

"I am not acquainted with this district of Serín. Do you know how it is situated, Mendoza?"

"My impression is that government has absolute control of it. The general had certainly no opposition."

"Very good; but you must remember that the general is a figure of the first magnitude in politics, and that his name would be sufficient to scare off all opposition."

"Nevertheless, I believe that the district, with such little help as the government may afford, is secure."

"Really?"

"Yes, sir."

"And is the general agreeable to Señor Rivera's candidacy?"

"Certainly he is; they are old friends. I will stand guarantee for him."

"Well, if that is so," said the President, rising and laying one hand on Miguel's shoulder; "count yourself as deputy."

"Many thanks, Señor Presidente!"

"Don't mention it. What other wish could I have than that all the deputies of the majority were like you! . . . Don't fail to come and talk things over with me soon. Though the elections will be postponed a little, it will be necessary for you to write to the district, and through the general's mediation come into relationship with some person of influence there. Don't send out any manifesto. When the occasion arrives, we will write to the governor. *Adiós, señores;* I am so glad to have made your acquaintance! You must feel assured that I am at your service. Do not forget me, and be sure to come and see me some time!"

Miguel departed, enthusiastic over his interview. When he was in the street, he exclaimed: —

"But how cordial the President is! Oftentimes one finds a mere clerk more puffed up in his office! Still he lets one see the superiority of persons when it is legitimate. I am not surprised that he has so many friends, and so firm ones. . . . How easy it is for a man high in rank to win friends! Now, here I am! He gives me merely a natural and kindly welcome, and says a few courteous phrases, and I am ready to die for him!"

"You must not neglect to write to the general immediately," said Mendoza, gravely.

"You are a man of ice, Perico! For you there are no friendships nor hatreds; no men are congenial or antipathetic. From all you take what you need, and go your way. . . . Perhaps you are right."

XVIII.

"You aren't vexed with me, Maximina, are you? The idea of leaving you alone all day!" he said, as he came to his wife's bed.

"Pshaw! If you did so, it must have been for some good reason," replied she, kissing the hand which was smoothing her cheek.

On the next day they received a call from Aunt Martina and her daughter Serafina. The worthy lady had grown visibly more feeble. 'Such a life she led with her husband! Don Bernardo kept growing more and more crazy with his foolish jealousies!' As she told what went on at home, she wept aloud.

"After forty years of married life, how could I possibly be unfaithful to your uncle, Miguel? Don't you think that I have proved that I am virtuous? And if I had to fall, moreover, it would not be with a *carcamal*[1] who

[1] Spanish nickname for an old man.

smells of drugs for a mile! Isn't that so? You understand! . . ."

Miguel nodded assent, with difficulty repressing a smile, for it was as good as a play to find his aunt imagining that any young man would flirt with her.

"I am an honest woman . . . Serafina, don't come in here; take the baby into the dining-room," she said, interrupting herself on seeing her daughter come into the bedroom with the sweet little thing in her arms.

"I have been all my life long. Never even in thought have I been untrue to my husband. In return for this, he puts me to shame before the servants, treating me little less than if I were a public woman. I cannot longer endure this martyrdom, Miguel. I am dying, dying daily. The other day he made a perfect scandal because he found the end of a cigar in my room. As neither Vicente nor Carlos smoke, he took it for granted that Hojeda had been there; he even went so far as to insist that it was a cigar such as the apothecary smokes, although he always smokes cigarettes! It made me faint away; they had to call the doctor. Finally, in the night, a little fifteen-year-old servant boy whom we have, seeing the serious trouble there was in the house, confessed to the maid that it was he who had left the cigar-end there, and he went to tell your Uncle Bernardo. Then, though he instantly dismissed him, he did not remain calm. The servants don't stay with us more than a fortnight; he imagines that they are all the apothecary's pimps. . . . Day before yesterday the newsboy came along and handed me the paper as I happened to be walking along the corridor. My husband sees it, takes it into his head that this too is an emissary, and dashes out of the window. Simply because Hojeda passed by a little while before! I can't tell all that goes on; it is madness, a catastrophe!

If it were not for Vicente, I would blow my brains out with a revolver. . . . I cannot go out without having my daughter with me, and then leaving on a piece of paper where I am going. . . . He has ordered all the mattresses in the house to be ripped open, so as to find some of the letters which he says that I have hidden. . . . Finally, — but do you want to hear more? He has sent and had an iron grating put in the fireplace, for he has an idea that Hojeda comes in that way. . . ."

"*Ave María!* How crazy poor uncle must be!" exclaimed Miguel.

"Don't you believe it; he speaks as reasonably as you or I, and his memory is as good as ever."

"Aunt, phrenopathy is not your strong point. Madmen have made progress like every one else in this world. Nowadays, they discuss and talk like all the rest of us. To distinguish an insane person from one in his senses you must depend upon a specialist; consequently, you must not meddle in things that you don't understand; however, my uncle is certainly showing symptoms that seem very suspicious, even to the ordinary intelligence."

"Sane or insane, I want to separate from him, for my life is a hell. But when once this subject came up, he became frantic, declaring that I wanted a divorce so as to marry my lover, and that he would empty his six-shooter into me if I did any such thing. . . ."

"Poor aunt!" said Maximina, with tears in her eyes.

"How does my life seem to you? . . . But it is not this alone. I have still another cause for tribulation. Eulalia's little maid is almost blind!"

"What of?" asked the young mother.

"What do you suppose, child? Of her eyes, of course!"

"No; I meant of what disease!"

"Ah! I don't know what name the doctor gives it.

Then, besides, Encarnación the maid, who you must know has been my hands and feet, got married last Monday. You can't imagine the state of the house since she left us! It is a republic, children! I can't be in half a dozen places at once. For a dozen years I have depended wholly on her. . . . She had the keys to the linen closet; she kept account of the washing; she took out the chocolate and the *garbanzos*[1]; she looked out for the wine-closet when the wines were getting low; she ironed Carlos' and Enrique's shirts (for Vicente sends his out to be done up). Finally, I hardly had to trouble myself about what the servants got to eat, she had them so under her control. . . . Now, whom can I put into the house? Whom could I put in her place, the service being so turned topsy-turvy? Thursday the lackey came to me saying that Modesta was not willing to mend the sleeve of his livery-coat, which he had torn. . . ."

"And Enrique? How about him?" asked Miguel, fearing that his aunt, in talking about the servants, would never finish, as was her custom.

"That is another thing! Bent on marrying the *chula!* There is no way of getting it out of his head. His father will not hear his name mentioned, and has already declared that, if he continues his relationship with her, he will send him out of the house. Vicente and Eulalia are also just as set against him. The one who 'pays for all the broken glass in the house' is myself, because I sympathize with him; don't you see?"

"Yes; Enrique has always been your favorite!"

"The whole family have always declared this to be the case, but it is not true; as you see, he is the least favored. . . . On the other hand, he treats me worse than a shoe!"

[1] A kind of pulse much affected by the Spanish.

The entrance of Serafina with the baby again interrupted the conversation; behind her came all the maids, evincing a lively excitement.

"What is the matter?"

"Why! the baby smiled!" said Serafina.

"Smiled! He smiled, as sure as there is a God in heaven, señorita," said one of the maids, adding her testimony.

"Go along with you! you are all crazy!" said Doña Martina. "Why, he is only two days old!"

"It cannot be," insisted Maximina, although she flushed with joy at the thought.

"But he did; he did!" exclaimed all the servants.

"This is the way it happened, señorita," said one maid, scarcely able to get her breath. "The Señorita Serafina was this way with the baby; do you see? And I looked and took hold of him by the shoulder, do you see? and lifted him up, and began to move him up and down, and to say: 'Little chicken![1] rosebud! pink! do you want to be called Miguelito, like your papa?' The baby didn't do anything. 'Do you want to be called Enriquito like your uncle?' He didn't do anything this time either. 'Do you want to be called Serafín after your aunt?' And then he opened his eyes just a wee bit, and made up a little mouth with his lips. Oh, so cunning!"

Maximina smiled as though she had been listening to a revelation from heaven. She, and her aunt also, were instantly convinced, but Miguel still doubted.

"When it comes to the smiling of infants not more than fifty-seven hours old," said Miguel, "I must confess to an unyielding scepticism. I am like Saint Thomas: seeing is believing."

[1] *Chiquirritin*, affectionate diminutive of *chiquetin*, little one.

"But he *did* smile, Miguel. Don't you have any doubt of it; I assure you he did, . . ." said Serafina.

"You do not offer me sufficient guarantees of impartiality."

"Very good! then he is going to do it again; now you shall see for yourself."

Serafina took the child and lifted him above her head, with great decision, at the same time asking him if he wanted to be called Serafín; to which question the child did not find it expedient to reply, perhaps from an excess of diplomacy, because it would not have been strange if the name had seemed absurd to him.

Maximina, meantime, hung on his lips as though the child were passing through a college examination.

"You try it, Plácida," said she, trying to hide her affliction.

Plácida stepped out of the group like one of the "artists" of Price's circus, coming forth to perform his great feat. She lifted the child with surprising skill, swung him from north to south, then from east to west, and with impetuous voice put the sacred questions: "Little chicken, sweetie! rosebud! pink! do you want to be called Miguelito, like your papa? Do you want to be called Enriquito like your uncle? Do you want to be called Serafín after your aunt?"

A lugubrious silence followed these words. All eyes were fastened on the young candidate, who, instead of showing a liking for any of the names proposed, made it very clear, though in an inarticulate way, that he could see no reason why, for a mere question of names, these hypochondriacs should bother him so much.

"Do you see?" said Miguel.

"The reason is, he isn't in humor for laughing," protested Maximina, very much dissatisfied. "*You* won't

laugh either when you are told to! Besides, he must be hungry by this time. Give him to me! Give him to me! Joy of my life! Sweetheart mine!"

And the child-mother snuggled her little son under the sheets, and put him to her breast.

On the third day baptism took place. With the melancholy resignation usually manifested by mothers in such circumstances, Maximina let them carry her baby away.

"He is a Christian already, señorita," said the maid, taking possession of him.

The young mother kissed him fondly, and pressed him to her heart, saying, in a whisper, "Thou shan't be taken from me again, child of my bosom!"

On the fifth day she was sitting up. In a week she was about the house; in a fortnight she was out of doors as usual. Enrique and Julita were the child's god-parents, and he was named after the former.

The pleasure which Miguel found in all these things was embittered by the serious danger threatening his fortune. All the time this thought haunted him to such a degree that it was a great effort for him to seem happy in his wife's presence.

He wrote to the general, but he replied in such an ambiguous and suspicious manner that it left no room for doubt that in this quarter no help was to be expected. From that time he deliberately made up his mind that his salvation depended on his election to Congress, in gaining influence in the majority and with the ministers, and in making the best of it at a given moment by getting from the reserve funds the money which he had compromised.

But Eguiburu had already made him three or four more calls, and was pressing him to guarantee the rest of the money; finally, after many circumlocutions and periph-

rases, he began to threaten him with a legal summons. Then he saw that it was necessary to risk the whole for the whole. If he did not take the additional guarantee his ruin was sure; Eguiburu would sell his houses by auction, and though some money would remain, as they were worth more than the amount of the debt, it would not be very much. On the other hand, it would bring about a scandal; everybody would look upon him as a ruined man, if not a swindler, and would turn their backs on him; he knew the world well enough to see that clearly. He would have to give up all thoughts of his election: poverty hath everywhere an evil savor.

He finally decided to endorse the I. O. U. of the twelve thousand duros, and he made an appointment with his creditor for the business. With emotion natural to one who is going to burn his ships, he presented himself one afternoon at Eguiburu's house. He was in his office talking with two individuals. Miguel wanted to wait until these had gone before he introduced his business; but the money lender immediately began to speak aloud, and as he noticed that the young man kept giving anxious glances at the intruders, and showed some reserve in replying, he said: —

"You can talk with perfect freedom; these gentlemen are friends, and our affairs are nothing to them."

Miguel immediately perceived what this meant.

"This miserable wretch is afraid that I shall try to get out of it by declaring my name a forgery, and has brought a couple of witnesses."

With this thought his pride revolted; he could have wished that he were not burdened with a family, so as to fling the thirty thousand duros through the window, at the same time slap this vile wretch in the face. He with difficulty restrained himself, and began to discuss the busi-

ness with the fierce money lender, whose voice kept growing louder and louder as he brought to light all that had gone before. Miguel answered his questions curtly. Finally, when he had satisfied him on them, and was about to sign his name to the I. O. U., the money lender said: —

"Here a difficulty arises, friend Rivera. It is a painful matter for me to mention to you because it will be a hard thing for you; but there is no other way out of it. Above and beyond the 246,000 reals which I have furnished for the support of the paper, I have also accommodated now the general, now Señor Mendoza, now the business manager of the daily, with some considerable funds amounting to 111,000 reals. . . . Here are the receipts. In them it is stipulated that these various sums were intended for the aid of the *emigrados*, though really they were for the intrigues of the revolutionists. . . . As you will easily understand, I do not intend to lose this money. . . ."

"And you expect me to pay that also, do you?"

"I might exact it of the general and Señor Mendoza, who have signed the receipts; but it would cost me the trouble of lawsuits. . . ."

"Yes, yes, it would be better for me to guarantee also these five thousand duros," said Miguel, in a sarcastic tone, "and thus free you and them from a little trouble."

"Señor de Rivera, I feel that I am causing you a great deal of annoyance. . . ."

"Nonsense! you feel nothing of the sort; when one has a man by the throat he ought to squeeze him. . . . Let me see! where is the I. O. U.? Put on the other too."

Eguiburu, flushed with triumph, spread out a paper, and Rivera endorsed it with a nervous hand. His face was

changed, and his voice sounded strange; but he preserved a serious and cool mien.

"Have you not added the item of the additional 111,000 reals?" asked Miguel, dryly.

"I am going to immediately," replied the banker, without being able to hide a certain confusion, which showed that he had not yet entirely lost his shame.

When he had filled it out, Miguel endorsed it, flung down his pen with a haughty gesture, and bade him farewell, bending his head.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen."

He left the room without shaking hands with any one.

His cheeks were on fire when he found himself in the street. The first thing that he did was to go to the editorial rooms of *La Independencia*, and announce to the editors and employés that the paper was to cease publication. He wrote a valedictory article, and left affairs half settled. On the days that followed everything was completely cleared up.

La Independencia being dead, his mind was more at ease, and he could devote himself entirely to "work for his election." On this he placed all his hope; if he entered Congress, he felt that he should soon become known among the majority; he was a ready speaker; he was accustomed to debate; finally, he was gifted with better judgment than most of those who at this time represented the country. Consequently, he devoted himself with ardor to asking recommendations, not only at first, but even at second, third, and fourth hand; he wrote numerous letters, and made various calls. Nevertheless, he was careful not to call upon the President very soon; he had sufficient cunning or tact to understand that he ought not to show too much eagerness, lest he should be despised; the best way was to work for himself first, and then remind the minister of his word.

Mendoza did not approve of the death of *La Independencia.*

"That was a bad move, Miguel; it may cost you dear," said he, with a gesture of disgust.

"What would you have," replied Miguel impetuously, "that I should meet out of my pocket all the expenses, besides carrying the bond that I have given?"

"Even though you had made a sacrifice, it would have been wise if you had kept up the daily at least till after the election."

Miguel tried still to maintain the opposite; but at bottom he saw instantly that his friend was right, and that he had acted rashly.

A month or more having passed since his first visit to the President, he determined to make a second. He went at the time at which he was usually in his office. The usher informed him that his excellency was very much engaged in talking with a committee of Catalanian deputies, and had given orders that absolutely no one should be permitted to enter.

"I must speak with him; he himself invited me to come here."

The doorkeeper looked at him with that indifferent and weary expression, really at bottom full of scorn, peculiar to those who constantly listen to the same things, and know that they are telling lies.

"If you wish to wait, you can sit down." Which was equivalent to saying: "What a double fool you are, friend! Do you suppose that I care to hear absurdities?"

Miguel flushed, and went and sat down on a sofa in the anteroom, where there were six or seven other persons waiting.

In a short time a gentleman in an overcoat came in

very pompously; the doorkeeper made a reverent bow before him, and opened the screen of the presidential chamber. It was evident that the order "to let absolutely no one in" was the doorkeeper's manufacture.

Miguel jumped up angrily, and said, opening his card-case: —

"Have the goodness to take this card to the President."

"I cannot, *caballero;* I have orders. . . ."

"I insist upon it that you carry this card to the President," he repeated in a louder voice, and with an energetic accent that had some effect upon the usher, who finally took it, though still grumbling, and entered the room.

"You will please wait an instant, *caballero*," said the man, coming out.

He waited an hour and a half; but he stayed, bent upon speaking with the chief of government, and neither the usher's insulting glances nor his own impatience, which was great, sufficed to make him give up his design.

At last the screen was opened, and out came a group of deputies, and among them the President with his hat on, and every appearance of being about to leave the building.

"Ah! Señor Rivera," he said, as he caught sight of him. "Excuse me . . . I have so many things on my mind . . . would you like to go back with me to the office."

"It is not worth while," said Miguel, taking the hint that this would be a bore to the grandee. The President took him familiarly by the lappet of his coat, and drew him to the bay-window.

"You have come to speak with me about the district, eh? How are things going with you?"

"Pretty well, I think. So far I believe that I have no opponent."

"I was going to speak of that very thing. I was thinking of writing you to come here. I am very glad that you have anticipated me. Yesterday I was told that there was an effort making to put in Corrales for that district."

"Who? The ex-minister of the moderate wing?"

"The same. I do not believe that he has any showing there, nor that the government needs to exert great pressure to defeat him, but it is well to be on the safe side. For nothing in the world would I have the most genuine representative and one of the most redoubtable advocates of moderatism, manage to make his unwelcome way into our house. For the district of Serín *is* our house, since it has elected Ríos, who was an important factor in the revolution. Have you been doing much work?"

"A good deal."

"Very well! then one of these days suppose you bring to me all the data which you have collected, the names of the *alcaldes*[1] who are opposed to us, and those of the people whom the government can influence. Meantime, don't give up for a moment. Get hold of the friends who gave the general his election; but don't put much reliance on promises; try to keep them attached to you in some way, either by offers or threats. Let us leave it that you will bring me the data, shan't we? *Adiós*, Rivera. Don't forget the road to this house."

He took his leave with a cordial pressure of the hand. Miguel, just as before, felt perfectly satisfied. The chief of government had a special tact for making his discourtesies forgiven, a frank and affectionate manner which immediately captivated whoever came near him.

A fortnight passed before he saw him again; for the

[1] Civil magistrates, judges or mayors.

two times that he went there, he was told that his excellency could not receive him as he was busy with the subsecretary.

"*Holá!* Rivera, I know that you have been here twice already; I felt it to the bottom of my heart that I could not see you. At all events, the matter has not been in a pressing hurry hitherto. Let us see! Sit down. How do you find the district? Has Corrales been giving you much to do?"

"Not much up to the present time."

"Indeed!" said the President, surprised. "Well, then; what I have heard is a very different story. I have been told that he is moving in a prodigious way: that the clergy are working for him decidedly, and that some of our friends, whom apparently Ríos has not been able or has not cared to serve, have gone over to him bag and baggage. . . . But it is possible that you are better informed."

"Señor Presidente, the letters that I have received from there say nothing of all this; on the other hand, all the general's friends assure me that, as he is agreeable to my candidacy and as it is supported by the government, it is impossible for a moment to doubt of our triumph."

"In spite of all that, it is proper that you should go there in person, talk with them, and watch the election. Those of us who have spent a few years in public life know that there is nothing certain."

"That is very good. When do you think that I ought to go there?"

"The sooner the better; but before you go, come here, so that I may give you some letters. You do not need one to the governor, for he has known for some time that you are the official candidate. Besides, I believe that you are acquainted. . . ."

"Yes, sir; I knew him when he was editor of *La Iberia*."

XIX.

Now while Miguel was busy in this excitement and anxiety, through the fear of approaching ruin to his fortunes, another danger, a thousand times greater, was threatening him without his knowledge.

We have already seen what a strange liking for Maximina had been awakened in Don Alfonso Saavedra: it can be compared to nothing else than that of the wolf, of which the fable tells us, who, having in his power the whole flock of a rich man, went to devour the only lamb owned by a poor man.

As the Andalusian *caballero* was not a man to be readily defeated, or else because he almost always found women easy to conquer, or because his ostentatious figure, his fortune, and his arrogance made him bold toward those who resisted him, he remained deeply disgusted because of the scene at the party, where he had played a part so supremely ridiculous in his own eyes. The absolute lack of coquetry which was noticeable in Rivera's wife, was what mortified him most of all, since he could not even invent the illusion that the indifference with which she had received his gallantries was more or less fictitious.

To say that after this rebuff his ardor greatly increased, would be doing little honor to the penetration of my readers: every one knows that disdain is far from being the best palliative for love, and that, in the majority of the mad passions that we see in the world, self-love comes in with a respectable contingent.

Saavedra did not lose his wits, nor did he even make any false show of appearing foolish, like Don Quixote in Sierra Morena; but as a man of sagacity, accomplished in

adventures of this sort, he determined not to lose again his self-possession, and to "establish the blockade" of the place according to the rules which his experience had laid down.

Quickly reading through Maximina's character, he divined that in her case there would be no use for that amiability stuffed with arrogance, that politeness imbued with disdain, which he had employed in winning his cousin Julia's love. This serene, serious, and humble nature could not be attacked on the side of vanity: he must aim at her affections. He proposed, therefore, to win her little by little; not in the guise of a rejected lover, which he well knew would be to lose forever her esteem, but as a sincere, affectionate, and helpful friend. He tried with all his power to dispel the suspicions which the conversation at the party might have left in the young wife's mind. He quickly discovered that the excitement under which she was at that time laboring had prevented her from noticing his attempt to flirt with her; and he was enabled at his leisure to carry out the plan of the campaign which he had designed.

He began gradually to make more and more frequent calls at their house, skilfully overcoming the antipathy which Miguel had not the power to dissemble. To accomplish this, he allowed him to notice a certain change in his behavior, in harmony with those ideas of peace, order, and propriety, which are characteristic of family life; he had some confidential conversations with him, in which he announced himself as a man who loathed a corrupt life, and was weary of the snaring pleasures of the world; in order to flatter his literary and scientific tastes, he borrowed certain books of him; and, after reading them, talked about them long and enthusiastically, which secretly much amused Miguel. Then, more than ever, he

understood and did not cease to marvel at the supine ignorance of so-called "society men." Don Alfonso had never in his life read much besides French novels, and sometimes he asked questions that would have astonished any schoolboy.

"He is one of our most distinguished savages," said Miguel to his wife, speaking of this new taste for books.

With Maximina our Andalusian entered into long conversations about his travels, laying special stress on the domestic customs of other countries.

"Just think," he said (he never addressed Maximina with the familiar '*tu*,' though he thus addressed Miguel), "in England they eat five times a day. In the morning they breakfast as they please; at nine or ten they have a meal of considerable formality; at one, another still more free and easy; at five or six they have dinner; and at bedtime also they have a bite of something."

Maximina, as a good housewife, was interested in these details, asked about the prices of provisions and of rents; and she was greatly surprised at the liberty given to the women in the way of going into the street alone, and even travelling.

"Come now, that is the great country for Maximina," said Miguel. "She is too modest to go alone to mass, and yet the church is only a step away."

The young wife smiled, in embarrassment.

"Well, now, yesterday I went with Juana to the Calle de Postas to buy some drawers."

"There you have a word that you could not speak in England before people."

"*Madre!* and when you buy them, what do you call for?"

"They speak it to the clerk as a confessional secret," suggested Miguel.

"Don't you believe him," replied Saavedra, laughing. "For those ladies' clerks in shops are not 'people.'"

Meanwhile, he was trying to get her interested in his own private affairs, asking her advice, and often following it.

"The truth is, that in respect of good advice I do not miss my mother. You take her place divinely, Maximina. I announce myself your adopted son, though I am old enough to be your father."

"But you are not as obedient as I should like."

"Only in one point, as you well know. In all the rest I obey blindly."

The point was marriãge. Maximina did not cease to urge him to get married.

"Hitherto I have never found a woman who would satisfy me for a wife," he replied.

"Why don't you marry Julia?" she asked one day at random, with the ingenuous frankness characteristic of her.

Don Alfonso was a trifle confused.

"Julia is a good girl. . . . Very well educated . . . she is talented . . . she is pretty . . . But see here! confidentially, do you think that I should be happy with Julia?"

"Why not?" demanded the young wife.

Saavedra kept silent a few minutes, remaining apparently lost in thought; then he said: —

"You will readily understand that as you are her sister-in-law, and I am her cousin, neither of us can with delicacy speak about her except in terms of praise, which she certainly deserves in many regards. But with you I have the courage to say one thing, and that is that we are not congenial. We are two. . . ."

And Don Alfonso put his two index fingers end to end.

"Why, I supposed that you were fond of each other!"

"Yes, we are fond of each other, but . . . between this and marriage there is a considerable distance . . . I remind you that I have just spoken as though you were my mother. Don't say anything of this to Miguel. He is her brother, and the most insignificant thing might trouble him."

In this insidious manner the serpent tried to make his way into this paradise. And he succeeded at last. As he had wisdom enough not to take advantage of it, he soon acquired a certain familiarity in visiting at their house, but always at the time when Miguel was at home; he knew perfectly well that the least shadow of suspicion passing through his mind would be sufficient to put an end to everything — God only knew how!

He also seized upon the occasions when *la brigadiera* and Julia were going to call on the young couple to accompany them. The jealousy which the Brigadier's daughter had felt on the night of the party had completely vanished when she saw the brotherly familiarity with which he treated her sister-in-law, and the pains which the latter took to bring her and her cousin together, and see them talk by themselves.

"It was through you that I got married; I have made up my mind to make a match for you," said Maximina.

"Yes, but through me you married the man whom you loved," replied Julia, with a laugh.

"You love Alfonso also; don't try to deny it, Julita!" replied Maximina, kissing her.

On the other hand, Saavedra, instead of breaking the link of love which united him to his cousin, had drawn it tighter of late, perhaps so as to avoid all suspicion of his plan, or, possibly, because he had another string to his bow, and wanted to manage them both at once; for anything might be expected from his depraved character.

But already several months had passed, and his dastardly undertaking had not made any progress at all.

To be sure, in Miguel's house he each day gained a more secure footing; he often dined with them, many evenings he dropped in for a social chat, and on others accompanied them to the theatre, and Maximina treated him like a brother. But this was the very thing that annoyed the *caballero:* in that house he was treated like a future brother. The young wife had not been convinced by his denial, and when she saw that he still kept up his attentions to Julia, she came to believe that he had denied it either out of hypocrisy or from a spirit of opposition, but that in reality he was deeply in love with his cousin; and there was reason for this, since Julia (as Maximina believed) was the most beautiful and fascinating girl in Madrid.

After the happy birth of Maximina's son, Saavedra behaved like a consistent friend, offering such services as were in his power, coming daily to make inquiries; in short, showing so much attachment and affection to the young couple that Maximina's tender heart responded with affectionate gratitude, as was perfectly natural.

Maximina was now more graceful and beautiful than ever; like all women who are really born to be wives and mothers, and are married to the men whom they love, the august crisis through which she had passed had been advantageous to her in every way. It was hard to recognize in this handsome young woman, with rosy cheeks and sweet brilliant eyes, the pale and timid maiden of Pasajes.

The Andalusian *caballero* was gradually growing more and more impatient. The first part of his strategy had been carried out point by point, as he had foreseen; he had won Maximina's esteem and even affection.

The second part remained, but this was the most difficult and dangerous in its execution, the most tempting in its result.

How should he begin?

In spite of his inconceivable pride, Don Alfonso had a foreboding that he was destined to failure from the very first, and he kept putting off the attack so as not to do it rashly.

Nevertheless, as his passion and impatience kept growing each day more impetuous, and he was not a man ever to be found wanting in audacity, he tried the experiment of giving her a few muffled gallantries, and these the young wife received as the jokes of a pampered friend; then again, he would sometimes press her hand a little too warmly when he greeted her, touch her foot lightly under the table, and even pulled out a hair or two stealthily, while her lord and master was dozing in his easy-chair.

Maximina at first supposed that these things were accidental, and paid no attention to them; but as the Andalusian persisted in them, she was a little startled, though without having any clear idea of the danger, and she tried to keep him at a distance, and from that time she began to have a vague fear.

Though his first efforts met with results so far from flattering, still Don Alfonso was completely infatuated, and though he would not have been willing to confess it, he was very near losing his self-possession in which he took such pride, and ready to "throw discretion out of the window."

How this came about we shall soon see.

Miguel was very particular that his son should have plenty of fresh air; he was full of modern theories of education, and believed that children ought to live as much as possible out of doors from the earliest infancy

Thus, as soon as Maximina was able to go out, he began to take long walks with her through the Retiro. How happy our little mother was in having her husband at her side, and her baby in front of her!

And what a baby he was!

It was necessary to have followed his progress step by step, as she had for a month and a half, to appreciate the portentous gifts with which he was endowed, and the boundless resources of his unequalled genius. She would have been greatly offended had any one insinuated that he still sucked his fingers when he accidentally thrust them into his mouth; nothing of the kind! after he had been a fortnight in this vale of tears, he had raised his thumb to his mouth with the set and deliberate intention of sucking it, for nothing else. But this did not signify in the least that the said thumb was as satisfactory to him as his mamma's breast; he did it simply to amuse himself in moments of diversion. His exquisite and delicate taste was equally well shown by his energetic refusal to take the porridge which Juana had the impudence to offer him one day when his mother was having a nap.

The angry expression of his face and the screams with which he received the proposition gave no room for doubt; he would have preferred to die of hunger rather than run the risk of spoiling his digestion by such unsubstantial and harmful concoctions.

But the thing in which he best showed his practical talent, as well as the perfection of his character, was in sleeping. As soon as he was born he made up his mind that he was going to sleep twenty hours a day at the very least; all that was done to dissuade him from this intention was in vain; apparently he had weighty physiological reasons for carrying it out. When unfortunately any attention to him or attempt to keep him awake

disturbed his plan, he would raise his voice to heaven, and the house in commotion.

Miguel would be the first to run to his aid, would take him in his arms and begin to walk up and down the corridors furiously, with the expectation — deluded man! — of putting him to sleep in that manner. The infant kept protesting more and more obstreperously against any such unsatisfactory method; the father would grow nervous after some time, and lest he should "dash him against the wall," he would turn him over to Juana's secular arm, but she rarely, also, had the good fortune to calm him. It was necessary to hand him over to his mother, who possessed in her beautiful and bounteous bosom the secret of putting to flight all his gloomy thoughts and making him see the world through rose-colored spectacles.

"But is this little monster always going to look to his mamma for his food?" asked Miguel, anxiously.

Maximina smiled, and shrugged her shoulders, and gave her son a kiss, as if to say that she was ready to give a thousand lives for him.

But when it was least expected, Juana, rich in contrivances like Ulysses, found one which, for its novelty and efficacy, left all others far behind.

And like the majority of fertile and wonderful inventions it had the additional merit of being simple. It consisted in holding the child in her arms with its mouth up, and dandling him up and down gently, and singing in rhythmic motion a certain melody.

We have always been desirous that great inventions with results of practical use to humanity should be spread abroad as soon as possible. Consequently, we shall not have the selfishness to hide this most original as well as simple expedient, which possibly the reader may be able

to put to trial some day — I hope so with all my heart. The words of the song are these: —

> Byelow! baby, byelow!
> See the wild hen fly low!
> There at last upon the mast,
> Swaying, swinging high low![1]

As to the music, I am inclined to think that success was not attained by that altogether. However, any one can be sure of obtaining a happy result provided that — let this be thoroughly understood — provided that it be repeated a number of times, and the last line sung in a dying tone. For the stubborn infant to hear it, and to stop, with his eyes fixed in ecstatic contemplation of no one knew what, was the same thing. Perhaps it may have been the terrible hen forever swaying on the mast. The one thing sure was that those little eyes, so open and terrified, quickly closed in the softest slumber: all the inhabitants of the house drew a deep sigh of satisfaction: the child was then forthwith carried to the great nuptial couch, where it was deposited in one corner like a bundle of linen.

I say that at first Miguel took pleasure in going out to promenade with his wife; when the baby was hungry Maximina would nurse him, finding a seat on a bench in some retired spot; then they would go into a "dairy" near at hand and get some chocolate.

But after a few days the Brigadier's son, either because of the exigencies of business or because he desired to chat with his friends, ceased to join her, suggesting that she go alone with the infant, because, under no consid-

> [1] *Ea, ea, ea,*
> *¡Qué gallina tan fea!*
> *¡Comó se sube al palo!*
> *¡Cómo se balancea!*

eration would he consent that the little one should be deprived of fresh air. With real heartfelt grief, though she concealed it as much as possible, she yielded to this desire. It was a great source of gain to the child, it is true, but she could never entirely conquer the timidity and fear which the Madrid streets inspired in her when she went out without her husband.

The first two days nothing went wrong in her excursion; but on the third, as she was walking along a lonely path in the Retiro to eat a bit of bread, which the nurse-girl had taken on purpose, — for nothing in the world would have tempted her to enter the chocolate-house alone, — she unexpectedly met Saavedra. Although she had seen him the day before at home, she felt a slight trembling, without knowing why; and a bright blush suffused her face, a sign which was not displeasing to the Andalusian dandy. He greeted her warmly, caressed the infant, and, without asking permission, walked along beside her. The nurse-girl respectfully passed on ahead.

The conversation turned on the ordinary topics of the time, the healthfulness of children going out, etc. Suddenly Saavedra, pausing, asked with a smile: —

"What did you do with the piece of bread that you were eating, Maximina?"

The young woman was so confused that she did not know what to reply.

"I am certain that you must have dropped it on the ground. Why are you ashamed to eat when you are nursing such a beautiful, strong baby?"

Enlivened by this praise, which for her was the most delectable that could be given, she replied: —

"Well, I feel a little weak by this time in the afternoon. . . ."

"Dry bread isn't very appetizing, my dear. Come to the *chocolatería*."

"Oh, no; I do very well: I don't care for chocolate."

"Don't be hypocritical. When you go out with Miguel, you take it every afternoon. You did not take it yesterday nor the day before, perhaps because you did not dare to go in alone. . . . Now, you will say: 'How does Alfonso know all these things?'"

"Indeed, I do not understand. . . ."

"And I will tell you very softly" (Don Alfonso brought his lips close to the young woman's ear); "because I have followed you those afternoons."

Maximina felt her fear increasing. At that moment she would have made any sacrifice to be at home. She did not answer a word, and went on walking. Don Alfonso likewise remained silent, so that the drop of poison might do its work.

When he came to the conclusion that Maximina's imagination had been sufficiently stirred, he brought the conversation back to where it had begun; that is, to ordinary commonplaces. He introduced a familiar chat as between two intimate friends, asking many questions about the baby, as that was a most convenient theme and most likely to please the young woman; he made affectionate fun of her; he touched upon his aunt *la brigadiera's* foibles; finally, by great skill, he tried to calm her agitation, so as to restore confidence between them. But he did not succeed; Maximina was still nervous, although she exerted great force to hide it; and she replied to his questions in a hoarse and altered voice. However, in the course of time and by much diplomacy, Saavedra partially calmed her. He besought her again with impetuous entreaties to go to the *chocolatería;* but she declined absolutely, and insisted that it was time to go home, though this was not true.

The sun was still pouring his rays along the sanded walks; a mild and perfumed breeze breathed through the air, presaging the approach of spring; the swelling buds on the trees likewise joyously told the tale. Many elegantly dressed children, with long curls touching their shoulders, were seen trundling hoops and tossing ball, followed by their parents or guardians. Maximina had said to herself many times on other days: "When mine will be here too!" But now she saw them pass in front of her, and yet scarcely perceived them, so deep was the agitation that swayed her.

Don Alfonso had been trying for some time to keep her back; but the more he insisted on her remaining, the more anxious she was to be going.

Now then, as he was walking toward the entrance of the Retiro and considering on the one hand how soon he would be obliged to leave her, and on the other that the step that he had taken was too bold for him to be able to retrieve it, he resolved "to throw the fish into the water"; and so he said, pausing again: —

"All this time you have not asked me why I followed you these last afternoons."

The young wife felt herself trembling more violently than ever, her face grew pale, her legs failed under her. She did not wish or was not able to find words to answer his question.

"Then I am going to tell you; because I feel for you, Maximina, what hitherto I have never felt for any woman in this world. From the very beginning of my acquaintance with you, I have been inspired with a lively admiration, irresistible, all-controlling. Afterward, I perceived that this admiration was rapidly changing into love, and I struggled with all my might to resist it. It was useless. — I have known many women; I have loved, or believed

that I loved, a few; but I swear to you that the feeling which they inspired was very different from that which now dominates me. I met them on equal terms, I saw their good points and their defects, I admired, and was kindled by their beauty; but now! now, it is not alone love which I feel, it is a deep adoration for your simple and open nature, a respect which until now tied my tongue, although the secret struggled to escape. In my eyes you might have read it whenever I looked at you. It is months since my heart has thus been filled by your beauty and goodness, Maximina. . . ."

This gentle *caballero* said all this string of gush with trembling lip and excited gestures, such as are the stock in trade of seducers, provided they, like him, are "men of the world." Observation has taught me that the "men of the world" who have been called dandies, fops, and *dudes*[1] are not *espirituales*, or, to avoid a Gallicism, do not speak with any greater wit and grace than in novels. In life, and above all when they are shaken from that languid and *blasé* appearance characteristic of them, they are apt to be as vulgar and absurd as the latest medical student.

Poor Maximina was so disturbed at hearing this amorous jargon, of which she understood only the general tenor, that her pallor changed to a livid hue, then the blood rushed suddenly to her face, her eyes grew dim, and she was ready to fall.

By what seemed like an automatic movement which she afterward could not explain, she abruptly quitted her companion, and started to run, crying: "Plácida! Plácida!" until she caught up with her, and then she said: —

"Run, run! how ill I feel!"

Both ran quite a while, until fatigue compelled them to relax their efforts; but by this time they were a long dis-

[1] *Lyones*, in Spanish.

tance from Saavedra, who stood in the same spot, full of amazement and chagrin at her sudden and unexpected flight.

A severe lecture, premeditated and prepared, in judgment on such imprudence and dastardly meanness as Don Alfonso had just committed, could not have been more hard and cruel than that desertion. Maximina, without being aware of it, had not only preserved her dignity, but had inflicted on the insolent fellow the punishment which is severest in such cases — that of making him seem ridiculous.

Saavedra remained rooted to the ground with rage, until seeing some promenaders approaching, and gazing at him with curiosity and then turning around to look at the fleeing women, he wheeled about and strode away from the place.

Fortunately, when Maximina reached home, Miguel was still away; if he had been there, on seeing her so excited, he would have made some inquiries, and perhaps have even become suspicious. She had time to get a little calmed; the servants really believed that she had had an ill turn, and so did Miguel himself when it came dinner time.

Nevertheless, that night and the following day the young wife was very nervous; she did not know what course to take. For the present she determined not to go out walking alone any more, under the pretext that she was afraid she might be attacked by another faint turn. But if Don Alfonso should come to call upon her, how should she present herself before him? She was certain that she should appear disturbed; her disgust and fear of him were so great that in spite of her they would appear in her face.

It happened that Don Alfonso realized the same thing,

and ceased coming to Miguel's house. But Miguel, accustomed to see him frequently, called attention to his absence, and said, while they were at table: —

"It is a number of days since Alfonso has shown up."

Maximina made no reply, and went on eating, with her head down. After a moment he added: —

"I should be glad if he did not come any more. In spite of all my efforts I cannot endure that man. Wednesday, they tell me, he fought a duel which, in my opinion, was a piece of sheer cowardice. He fought with an engineer, who never in his life had been used to weapons; and, of course, wounded him dangerously at the first encounter. A man who goes out to fight with a certainty that such is going to be the case is not a true man, nor can he be called even decent."

"Oh! there is no doubt about that," Maximina would have said, with the greatest unction.

But she did not dare. The poor girl imagined that Saavedra would not take any more thought about her. Without her adored Miguel having had any annoyance whatever, everything had come out satisfactorily. Little did the ingenuous young wife know of the nature of human passions. She was soon to learn to her sorrow, what pride and revenge united are capable of attempting.

XX.

It happened to be about this very time that Enrique made up his mind "to drag the honor and good name of his family through the mire." In fact, he presented himself one afternoon at Miguel's house, and confided to him his project, telling him with tears in his eyes that it was not his intention to drag anything through the mire, and far less the honor of the family, but simply to fulfil

the bond which he had undertaken, and the words which he had given to Manolita.

"I am a gentleman, Miguel. I cannot decently go back on this little girl. Put yourself in my place. I am well aware that my family are right in opposing this marriage, but I swear to you that it is not my wish to injure its good name. Why should I? What good would it do me to drag it through the mire, I should like to know!"

"That is evident; you have no occasion to revenge yourself on the good name of your family."

"Of course not!"

Then with much hesitation and timidity he confessed that he had a plan. It cost great trouble to make him reveal it.

Finally, by dint of entreaties, he declared that if Maximina would do him the honor of being the *madrina* at his wedding he should consider himself the happiest mortal in the universe. After he had said that he repented, the more as he saw that Miguel remained lost in thought; he then became so conscience-stricken that he flung his hat on the floor, and began to call himself names, and tear his hair.

"What does this mean, Enrique? Have you gone mad? As far as I am concerned there is no objection to it in the least. Ask her yourself, and if she consents, it is done."

"No, I won't ask her. Manolita is an honest girl, but of a very humble station in life. All those who will be present at the wedding will be also 'children of the people.' 'The lowest of the low,' do you see, my lad? We must call things by their right names. Your wife will not want to be there, and right she is."

Miguel got up from his chair, went to the door, and shouted: —

"Maximina!"

Instantly the little wife appeared.

"Enrique has come to ask you to be *madrina* at his wedding. Will you accept his invitation?"

"Oh! and so you are to be married, are you? Then I think that I should be very much pleased to be *madrina*."

Enrique's face lighted up as though at that instant he had seen a procession of all the angels, archangels, thrones, and dominions of Heaven; but suddenly growing serious, he replied, a little stiffly: —

"No, Maximina, it is impossible for you to be *madrina*. People of your station will not be present at my wedding."

The young matron looked at him in surprise: —

"Of my station?"

"Yes; only women of the common people will be there: fish-wives, fruit-women, tavern keepers' wives, etc."

"What difference does it make to me who comes? I will be *madrina* if you wish. Do you take me for some princess?"

"An angel is what you are!" exclaimed Enrique, instantly losing his senses: as proof of it, his hat, which just before he had dashed to the floor, he now flung to the ceiling, then he immediately sprang after it into the air, making three or four portentous pirouettes; quickly realizing the enormity of his behavior, he took Maximina's hands, and began to kiss them in a perfect frenzy.

"You will forgive me this sudden freak, won't you, Miguel? Your wife is better than if she were made of gold and diamonds!"

"I suppose so; what could I do with a wife made of gold and diamonds?"

"Man alive! don't be so literal; that is a saying! Maximina, every one speaks so well of you . . . even my

sister Eulalia, which means a great deal, as you can imagine. But no one knows what your worth is! As soon as I take part in another *corrida*, I will present you the bull."

"No, no, Enrique," protested Maximina, laughing.

The young man's face darkened.

"That is a fact; a bull killed by me has little value. But I assure you that I am going to, or at least I can get Lagartijo, the great Lagartijo himself to present you one in a benefit fight."

"You misunderstood me; I said no, because I never go to bull-fights."

"What! doesn't Miguel take you? Shameless wretch! Never you mind, child; leave it to me, and at the first *corrida* that takes place, you shan't fail of a private box, or at least two front seats."

The *padrino* chosen to stand with Maximina was a cavalry captain, an old comrade of the bridegroom's.

"I am afraid that he may not be to your mind, Madrina" (from that moment till the end of his days, Enrique never called Miguel's wife anything else); "for though he is a very distinguished man, he is rather a misogynist,[1] do you see?"

"I don't understand you. . . ."

Miguel burst into a laugh.

"That is, he does not enjoy ladies' company."

"Ah, very good," rejoined the young wife; "I will promise not to trouble him."

"How could you trouble him, star of the morning?" exclaimed Enrique, losing his balance again; "It is worth more to hear you talk than Tamberlik, in the *credo* of '*Il Poliuto*'! What I fear is, that he will not hold his tongue."

[1] In Spanish, *reña*, a big rock; a slang expression.

The time set was Wednesday, and the hour seven in the morning. The day broke clear and magnificent; in the Madrid streets not a speck of mire could be seen; that which soiled the good name of the Rivera family was purely metaphorical. Miguel and Maximina went to the bridal apartment, which was the third-story room on the same Calle del Baño, not facing the street.

Enrique had rented it after consultation with his lady-love, and had furnished it little by little, bringing every day, like a goldfinch, his bit of straw in his bill: one day the wardrobe; another, a table; another, a couple of cane-seated chairs; and then again, a few dozen of dishes; and so on. The nest was plain and small, but pleasant, like all that is new and prepared for and by love.

Enrique had not told a falsehood: no *lady* was present or gentleman in dress-coat, except the *padrino*, who had one on, though it was the worse for wear, to be sure. On the other hand, the worthy women who were present, and the handsome young *chulas*, showed in their dress a picturesque magnificence very pleasant to see,—rich mantles of *burate*, brocaded in a thousand colors, and reaching almost to the floor; over that lace or plush mantillas, unlimited shoes of patent leather; in their ears huge pearl pendants; on their fingers enormous diamond rings. The arrangement of the hair was in almost all cases the same—parted in the middle, the hair on the crown bunched up behind, and little corkscrew curls at the temples.

The men for the most part wore a short coat and narrow-brimmed hat; but there were quite a number of *toreros*, friends, all of them, of the bridegroom; and they wore well-girdled jackets of velvet or broadcloth, according to their standing in the art, tight-fitting pantaloons, and embroidered shirts with huge brilliants in the bosom.

Miguel was the only member of the family that graced the occasion. Julita, who had been told of it by her brother, wanted to go, but her mother forbade it. Enrique likewise did not invite his friends in his own rank of society, for the reason that he gave Maximina; that is, because he did not want to mortify them.

When Miguel's wife made her appearance, a murmur of respect and admiration went round among the guests; some among them were polite enough to take off their hats. Manolita, who, be it said parenthetically, was exquisite in her black merino dress and velvet mantilla, when she saw her come in, was as confused as though it had been the queen, and went to meet her, trembling and with her face aflame.

"Señorita. . . . I am much obliged. . . . How do you do?"

"But," our readers will say, "have we not insisted that Manolita was a bold and redoubtable *chula*, if there are such?"

Now then, you shall see; the majority of these *chulas* are really, to use the vulgar expression, 'unfortunates'; their exterior is the only terrible thing about them.

The strange thing in this case was that Maximina was as confused and flushed as Manolita was. Instead of having a haughty look or affecting a condescending expression as many ladies would have done to find herself among a set of plebeians, our little matron acted as though she were just making her appearance in an assembly of princes.

The procession started on its march to San José's.

But before we forget it, let us say that among the guests was dexterous José Calzada (a) *el Cigarrero*, with his band, which unfortunately missed the congenial Baldomero. The famous bull-slayer respectfully shook

hands with Maximina, and she, who had shed tears when Miguel described the death of Serranito, gave him a look that spoke louder than words the admiration which his noble conduct had inspired in her.

Manolita also introduced her father to her, that awe-inspiring Cyclops whose acquaintance we have already made; fortunately he had not as yet had a chance to get tipsy; to greet her he doffed his *sombrero*, which must have weighed half an *arroba*,[1] and emitted a series of such odious grunts that Miguel's wife was frozen with terror.

The house in the Calle del Baño was all in commotion with this wedding. The procession escorting the pair made an infernal noise clattering down the stairs; the neighbors opened their doors to watch them pass. In the street, also, the people stopped, and shouts, "A wedding! a wedding!" and the questions of the passers-by were heard.

"Who are they," demanded an old shopkeeper.

"A milkmaid marrying a señorito: look; that's him in front," replied a *chula*, who had stopped in front of the shop.

"And the bride?"

"There she goes in the middle of 'em all, walking with a señorita!"

"Handsome piece! The señorito shows good taste. I would not object to marrying her myself."

"Aha! That would be a good one, wouldn't it!"

"Well, I'd take you, Barbiana!"

"Ay! You'd see me die first! My dear old fellow, 'Young sheep and old bell-wether never get along together.'"[2]

[1] A Spanish weight of twenty-five pounds.

[2] *Perro nuevo y perro viejo,*
Nunca han hecho buen trebejo.
Literally: young dog and old dog never play together well.

"Señorita," Manolita was meantime saying to her *madrina*, "I can never repay you for the honor which you are doing me. Enrique was right in praising you!"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't call me señorita; I am your cousin; I want you to call me Maximina; say 'thou' to me."

"Oh, I could never do that! What I am going to ask you as a special favor is, that when we get home, you will let me give you a dozen kisses."

Maximina smiled, and pressed her hand affectionately.

The priest blessed the union of the couple in the sacristy; then they went into the church and heard mass and took the sacrament.

When they went out into the street, the clock was just striking eight. The procession had greatly increased; there were more than sixty people surrounding the bridal couple. As it was impossible for so many to drink chocolate in the rooms in the Calle del Baño, it had already been decided days before that they should go to the Café de Cervantes, which is near the church. They accordingly went in there, and almost completely filled it. A most animated conversation sprang up on all sides, so that soon no one could hear himself talk.

Enrique, flushed with emotion, sat down at one table with Miguel, and began to unburden himself with remarkable verbosity: —

"I know well enough, Miguel, that I might have married a señorita, but don't you see, I have never cared at all about señoritas? They say the trouble is that I haven't any conversation. It may be so. We shall see; Miguelillo, isn't my flamingo worth all the sugar-paste señoritas of the upper ten? And besides, she knows how to work, and that is more than any of these high-flyers know how to do; and she can live on two *pesetas* a day,

and she can put a shawl on her head — do you understand? and take her place in the Plaza de la Cebada,[1] where vegetables are the cheapest; and when we go to the theatre, we shan't have to get a box or seats in the parquet. From the gallery we can see the play well enough, and be well satisfied; and if it is necessary, she can cook the dinner, and there is no need of going with her every day making calls. That comes in handy, my boy! You see, I am going to have forty-three duros' pay now that I am in the active service; my rooms will cost seven; that leaves thirty-six. We shall get along, Miguel; we shall get along! Besides, my mother has promised to help me; she will give me *garbanzos* and chocolate, and some little thing 'under the rose,' do you see? We've got our rooms all fixed up. It cost me a good deal of work. For nearly a year I have not taken coffee, nor gone to the theatre, nor smoked anything except cigarettes; everything so as to save for this furniture! Man! I tell you that I have gone with one hat all the year, and that I have had my boots tapped three times! But I have done it all with delight for my darling *chulilla*, who is worth all Peru! Just look, look at her! See what eves she is making at us!"

Enrique's happiness was so contagious that Miguel always felt happy to be with him.

This lad had often made him think that to be happy in this world one needs only to believe that one is.

They had not yet finished taking their chocolate, when the doors of the café were flung open, and six or seven street-musicians appeared on the scene, and they with their brass instruments made a discordant and unsanctimonious band. They immediately began to set up a waltz or something of the sort. Now, instead of escap-

[1] "Barley Square," formerly famous for its executions.

ing, and hiding in the garret, these people received the band as though it were the *Sociedad de Conciertos*, and began to accompany the music with their voices, and with their spoons, enough to scare away Mephisto himself.

Maximina got up, not on account of the noise, but because she was anxious about her baby, who was probably getting hungry. Manolita looked at her with timid eyes, as though reminding her of her promise. Miguel's wife threw her arms around her and kissed her tenderly, whispering in her ear: —

"Come and see us, and I will show you my baby: you will, won't you?"

When husband and wife left the café, they were in a happy frame of mind. Hearing from a distance the noise of the band and voices, Miguel exclaimed: —

"What a jolly wedding this has been! No toasts were given, and no poems were read!"

XXI.

WITH suitable precautions, that is, first vaguely insinuating the idea, afterwards making it more and more definite, Miguel brought it to his wife's notice that he must go to Galicia for a few days. She received the news with consternation; but perceiving that her husband was annoyed, she made an effort to control herself, and became calm, and finally even quite cheerful. But finding herself, as always after breakfast, seated on her husband's knee, while the "little rascal" was sleeping, and ready to talk about the linen that the traveller would need for his journey, the tears came into her eyes when least expected.

"What a girl you are," exclaimed Miguel, kissing her, "only a few days' separation!"

"I was not crying for that exactly," rejoined Maximina, endeavoring to smile. "But for several days I have been having such melancholy forebodings."

"What forebodings?"

"I imagine that I am not going to live very long."

"*Ave Maria!* what a terrible idea! What makes you have such crazy notions?"

"I don't know," replied the little wife, smiling though the tears were sliding down her cheeks. "What I dread most is leaving my baby while he is so young."

"Don't be absurd!" said Miguel, impatiently. "These gloomy ideas are caused by the sadness that you feel at having me go away. As for the rest, though death is liable to come to any of us, there is no reason to think that yours is near at hand. You are a child of seventeen; you were never ill a day in your life, except when the baby was born. You enjoy perfect health. . . . It is much more likely that I should die before you: I am considerably older; besides, I haven't a very strong constitution, as you know. . . ."

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed Maximina, throwing her arms around him, and bursting into a passion of tears. "I don't want to hear that you may die!"

"Why, my child, there is nothing to be done about it."

"But I don't want to hear about it; I don't want to, I do not!" she replied, with such lovely determination that her husband covered her with kisses.

After a while, and when they had been speaking of other things, Maximina returned to the same topic.

"If I should die, you would marry again, wouldn't you, Miguel?" she asked, with an expression half serious and half mischievous, which nevertheless concealed a very real meaning and a genuine anxiety.

"Back to the old subject? Please don't indulge in any more of these follies, sweetheart."

"Would you marry again, Miguel?" she insisted, ceasing to smile, and showing her anxiety.

"Well, then, I am going to speak with all frankness: If you should die (but you aren't going to die), I will not answer for it, that in the course of my life I should never have anything to do with other women; but I give you my word and oath that I will never marry any one else. And this is not alone because of the deep and affectionate love which I bear you, so that to-day you are an essential part of my being, and if you were taken away from me it would be as though half of myself were taken away, but also for selfish reasons. I should be unhappy with any other woman. God has endowed you, my darling, with all, absolutely with all, the qualities necessary for making me happy."

The little wife well understood that these words were sincere, and she looked at her husband with enthusiasm and joy.

Miguel, in speaking the last words, had felt his heart growing tender: he covered his eyes with his hands, and turned away his head. On seeing him in this attitude a smile of intense delight illumined his wife's face.

"Are you crying?" she whispered into his ear.

Miguel did not reply.

"Are you crying?" she repeated. "You *are* crying; don't try to deny it." And with infantile curiosity she tried to pull his hands away from his face.

"Stop, stop!"

"Let me see thy tears, Miguel!"

And she struggled with all her might to see her husband's eyes full of tears.

"Are you satisfied now?" he asked, laughing; then

after a moment of silence, "And you, Maximina," he said, in a tone of anxiety, "would you marry again?"

"Oh! for Heaven's sake!"

"You are very young, and it would not be at all strange if this should happen. After some time the same circumstances might drive you to it! Perhaps your relatives might urge you into it: a woman is not well off alone in the world. . . . If this took place, I have no doubt that you would love your husband; but I could take my oath that you would not love him as much as you love me. There are things, Maximina, that are never repeated, and one of them is first love; especially if this first love has been blessed by Heaven as yours has been. Just notice the walls of this study; preserve in thy memory the form of these pieces of furniture, the color of the carpet, the sweetness of that sunbeam that comes through the window. All this that now has so little importance, if I should die, would, perhaps, seem much more so, for the moments of bliss which we are now spending here, with thee sitting on my knees, and with me looking into thy dear eyes, would never again return, Maximina, would never return for thee!"

The little wife fell back against her husband's breast, when she heard these words, like a sensitive plant which contracts at the slightest touch.

"Oh! Miguel, light of my life, what have I done to make thee speak to me so?"

And sobs choked her.

He tried to pacify her by such means as were in his power; but to accomplish it he found himself obliged to promise her solemnly that he would not die!"

At last the day set for his journey arrived. It had been agreed that during Miguel's absence Julita should come and sleep with her sister-in-law. She and *la briga-*

diera both came over that afternoon to bid the traveller good by. It was just dusk. Miguel, after eating a hurried and solitary dinner, sent for a carriage, and prepared to depart. When he went toward his wife to kiss her, she darted away, and ran to hide in her bedroom.

"But it is your husband, *tonta!*" cried Julita, laughing.

Miguel followed her, and groping around in the darkness, found her in one corner.

"Don't you want me to kiss you, sweetheart?"

"Oh, yes, Miguel; but there before people I should die of mortification!"

As our young man took his place in the carriage he felt his heart depressed within him.

"If it were not for what is at stake, I should not have been mixed up in this dirty business, and I certainly should not be leaving my wife and baby," he said to himself, with some bitterness.

Before reaching his district he made a stop at the capital of the province, where he was received with extreme cordiality by the governor. He was a young man who had recently been filling the position of second or third *gazetillero* on a liberal paper at the capital. It was said in the city that his administrative knowledge might possibly have been more solid without doing any harm; but, on the other hand, whenever it took his fancy he replied in rhyme to letters, walked the street, in free and easy costume, gave lunch-parties to the provincial deputies almost every day, enjoyed cracking jokes with the ushers, and when the assembly was in session, sometimes permitted himself to whistle in an undertone arias from *Blue Beard* or *The Grand Duchess.* His name was Castro.

As soon as Miguel presented himself at the *Gobierno Civil,* Castro gave him a most hearty squeeze, as though he

were an intimate friend, although they had never spoken together in Madrid more than three or four times, and began to address him from the very first with the familiar "thou." He instantly promised him the whole weight of his official influence.

"I'll get you in swimmingly, my lad, no matter what it costs. Go to the district and write me from there all that you need, and I will do for you anything in the world."

Rejoiced and flattered by this reception, our hero on the following day took the diligence for Serín, which was about seven leagues from the capital.

It was a miserable little village, but admirably situated near a river, the banks of which displayed the luxuriant vegetation of tropical countries, and the fresh verdure of the North; orange-trees, lemon-trees, and river-laurels almost shook hands with oak and chestnut groves which swept up the slopes of the mountains; they in turn were gentle and green in the foreground, dark and steep in the background, thus making a magnificent chain, rendering the landscape most picturesque. The group of white cottages that composed the village of Serín was surrounded by a thick border of trees, except on the side of the river, in whose clear blue waters it was reflected.

Now this delectable spot, which appeared like a little corner of Paradise was rather a little corner of Hades, as Miguel was quickly able to assure himself. It even had, as we shall soon see, not one, but two, serpents to torment its inhabitants.

These had been divided from time immemorial into two parties — "those of the Casona" and "those of the Casiña," thus named because the first met in a great, dark mansion with two machiolated towers, which stood at the upper end of the village, while the others met in a

one-storied and highly ornamented edifice with a handsome portal with an iron grating and two great balconies, and was situated on the Muelle by the river.

They were likewise called "Don Martín's Party" and "Don Servando's," after the name of their respective leaders.

The division of these parties was not based upon the fact that the one, that of the Casona, represented the traditional and conservative element, while that of the Casiña stood for the progressive and liberal, the first having often been seen taking the side of "liberal administrations," and the other sustaining the cause of the "moderate" candidate. The quarrel was kindled solely by the eagerness for controlling local politics, and thus of being in last analysis the masters of the village. The rest was not of the least consequence. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Don Martín's party had marked tendencies towards absolutism. In Don Servando's, on the other hand, there was no noticeable predilection for liberty.

It was this Don Servando, who, as Miguel alighted from the diligence and received him, took him home, willy nilly. He was a fat man of medium height, and was approaching his seventieth birthday; his face, with its deep red complexion, was adorned with short gray whiskers; he wore a very long, black frock coat, and black *hongo* besides.

"Have I the honor of addressing Señor Corcuera," he asked him very politely, with a strong Galician accent.

"No, sir; my name is Miguel Rivera, at your service."

"That is very good," the Galician replied, and addressing himself to a servant, he said: "*Muchacho*, look up the gentleman's luggage, and take charge of it. I will tell you where it has to be carried."

"I suppose that you are Señor Bustelo," Miguel hastened to say.

"We will have a chance to talk as we go around yonder corner. You will do me the favor to follow me."

And Don Servando set forth with firm and deliberate step toward the corner indicated. Miguel followed him without understanding what it all meant.

When they had reached there, Don Servando said to him, without looking at him, and as though he were speaking with the above-mentioned corner: —

"I received word from the Señor Governor that you were to arrive this afternoon, and I take it for granted that you will do me the honor of accepting modest hospitality at my house."

"Provided that you are Señor Bustelo."

"The house that you see yonder, where there is a belvedere, is mine, my dear sir. Have the goodness to go on ahead, and I will immediately follow."

Miguel did what he commanded, without understanding the meaning of all this mystery. Afterwards he had just as little an idea, but it no longer surprised him.

Don Servando's predominant characteristic, which was manifested in all his acts, and never failed him, was caution. He never asked directly more than he already knew; what he was anxious to find out he always accomplished by means of a long series of circumlocutions, and hiding his design. He never gave a straightforward and prompt answer to questions, no matter how insignificant or meaningless they were.

After being a few hours in his company Miguel became convinced that it was idle to try to find out anything about his personality. It was, above all, on account of this quality that he was greatly admired by all his friends and feared by his opponents. He talked little, and never looked a man in the face.

After they had eaten supper, and the guest's luggage had been brought in with infinite precautions, the two shut themselves into Don Servando's office, where, in less than an hour, he imbibed six bottles of beer.

"It seems to me that you are fond of beer, Señor Bustelo."

"Psh! so, so. . . . I prefer wine," he replied, with the gravity and the Galician accent peculiar to him.

On the following days Miguel had the opportunity of observing that he scarcely touched wine.

One after another, and as though some desperately dangerous conspiracy were in progress, the official candidate received the calls of Don Servando's partisans, who promised great success in the coming election. Nevertheless Miguel was quick to see that the forces were very evenly balanced; indeed, so well that while in what we might name the urban region of Serín, in the brain of the community, the Casiña party was predominant, it was in a large minority in the rural districts. Official influence was as little at the complete disposition of this party; while the town authorities[1] of Serín were theirs; those of two other precincts, Agüeria and Villabona, gave allegiance to Don Martín, and it was in these, after all, that the key of the election finally lay.

General Ríos had been put up for this district without opposition, and from that moment the partisans of the Casona had rivalled Don Servando's in zeal and efficacy in serving him. This was the usual tactics among them. When they found it impossible to struggle they humiliated their proud heads, and did all that they could to win the deputy's friendship, or at least his good will, to beg a few of the crumbs of favor, so that they might not be wholly

[1] The *ayuntamiento*; consisting of *alcalde*, or mayor, and the *regidores*, or aldermen.

at the mercy of their implacable enemies. They well knew by experience that if this happened, they were liable to all kinds of annoyances, and sometimes to the guard-house, since each party excelled in letting the star of the morning witness their *dissipations*.

Owing to this state of affairs, though the general inclined toward the Casiña party, he had not consented to the others being maltreated, and he had even gone so far as to leave in their hands certain offices which were in the gift of the state, and this stirred up the wrath of Don Servando's friends, and made them so indignant that they secretly murmured against the count, and even proposed to "pay him off" when the suitable occasion came.

Thus it was that as the horizon was now darkened by a second deputy, who they hoped would be absolutely in their interests, and tear up by the roots Don Martín's influence in the *concejo*,[1] at least for a long season.

It was for this reason that Don Servando had the keen foresight to lodge him in his house, in order that neither Don Martín nor any of Don Martín's friends could call upon him.

On the next morning after his arrival Miguel wrote Maximina, and sallied forth to drop the letter in the post-office, thinking that it was a good time to explore the town. In the first street, which ran into the Muelle, he discerned a letter-box, and made for it; but, as he came near to it, he found that it had a board nailed over the aperture. He walked along a little farther and soon saw another; but here this same state of things was repeated, and likewise in three or four others which he happened upon in various parts of the village.

"Will you please tell me where I can mail this let-

[1] The collective name of the town or district authorities.

ter? . . . All the boxes that I have found are nailed up," he said to a domestic who was passing.

"It's because Don Matías is postmaster now . . . you'll find it in a provision store near the Muelle, do you see? . . . Don't miss your way . . . follow this street down, and you'll see it."

The postmastership, as he discovered afterwards, was one of the perquisites which the two parties of Serín quarrelled over furiously, it having passed alternately from the hands of one of Don Servando's friends to those of one of Don Martín's, and *vice versa.* As each time it came into the hands of a different person, — for it was necessary to satisfy all, — it happened that many of the houses in Serín had been pierced for letter-boxes. The postmaster received the salary of three thousand five hundred reals [1] a year.

As he was walking along one of the streets he met Don Servando, who greeted him solemnly, and started to pass on.

"What is the good word, Señor Bustelo; are you going home?"

"No, sir, no; I am taking a little walk; then I have some business to attend to. . . . Good by, Señor de Rivera."

Miguel went home, but before he reached the house he saw Don Servando go in. Why had he lied? God only knows.

When he learned that Miguel had posted a letter, the chief of the Casiña party turned livid.

"What! . . . Señor Rivera . . . a letter?"

"Yes, sir; a letter," replied Miguel, not understanding the reason for his surprise.

"But don't you know, my dear sir, that Don Matías is . . . belongs to the *others?*"

[1] $175.00.

"What of that?"

"Here we never receive or drop letters at the village post-office; we send them to Malloriz, and there we have also a person who gets those directed to us, and forwards them to us afterward."

"Man alive! what distrust!"

"We can't be too careful, my dear sir; we can't be too careful."

Assured by the thought that his letter was for his wife, he immediately invited Don Servando to take a bottle of beer. For the leader of the Casiña beer-drinking was an august function of life. He had surprised the community by saying, perhaps with truth, that he drank five duros' worth a day of this beverage. Such prodigality, truly tremendous in that region, helped him not a little in maintaining his prestige. Don Servando was the only rich man who spent all his income in Serín, and this was because he was a bachelor.

XXII.

THE first thing that the Casiña party demanded of Miguel, as a condition of his election, was to accomplish the dismissal of the jailer, get the post-office from Don Matías, and the tobacco-shop[1] from a man named Santiago, all of whom belonged to Don Martín's party. . . . And in fact Miguel wrote to the governor and his Madrid friends; in five or six days came the decapitation of the tobacconist and Don Matías, and shortly after that of the *alcaide*, there being named in place of them three other individuals, who swore by Don Servando's beer. This

[1] In Spain the *estanquillos*, where snuff and tobacco are sold, are under special government license.

gentleman, when he received the news, found it in him to smile and drink three schooners without breathing.

His friends perceived in that smile and the absorption of the three schooners such a great and deep mystery, that they looked at each other, filled with faith and enthusiasm for their chief.

But the Casona party were bold enough in spite of being in opposition, and they proclaimed to the four winds the candidacy of Corrales, who, having been minister several times, enjoyed much notoriety in the country, although he had no official power to back him. The fact was that he was master of the *ayuntamientos* of Agüeria and Villabona, and that the combined vote of these districts fully counterbalanced the majority which his opponents might raise against him in Serín. The election was by universal suffrage, but both parties had perfectly calculated their forces. Consequently, the first question on the carpet that night in Don Servando's office, the dismissal of the *alcaide* having been obtained, was the suspension of the municipal governments above mentioned, and this had to be done before the opening of the electorial period.

They were there discussing the most suitable methods of carrying out this plan, when one of the numerous spies whom Don Servando kept in the village came into the room and informed them that Don Martín had booked for the following day in the *Ferrocarrilana*.

This bit of news caused deep perturbation among those present, and it was immediately understood, though no one dared to ask the question of him, that Don Servando would join him in this journey, since such had been the custom from time immemorial. As soon as Don Martín made a move from the village, his rival packed his valise, and followed him wherever he went, taking it for granted

that when he went away it must be for *something*, and this something could not be else than some harm for himself or his friends. When Don Servando undertook a journey, his enemy Don Martín did the same; everybody in the town knew this custom, and no one saw anything strange in it.

In truth, as soon as all had taken their departure, Don Servando sent his servant to secure an outside seat in the *Competencia*. He did not bid Miguel farewell, but made arrangements so that he should not suffer from any lack during his absence.

This lasted two days.

At the end of this time he returned, or, more correctly, both chiefs returned. Don Martín had gone down to the capital to have a tooth filled.

Every day Miguel received a little letter folded double, and directed in a handsome English hand — that taught at the Colegio de Vergara. Maximina did not write a great deal, though much more than before she was married. Her instinct told her that Miguel could not laugh at the trifles that she told him now, especially if they had reference to the baby. In all of them there was expressed an irresistible desire for him to return home as soon as possible, and yet she tried to hide it lest she should disturb him in his duties.

"Yesterday, Julita took me out to drive. It was crowded, and she was very gay. When I got home, I felt such a deep sadness that I cannot explain it to you. I remembered that the last time that I rode through the Castellana was with thee, my life, my all!"

The maiden from Pasajes, under the influence of her husband, who had never been sparing in the matter of affectionate words, had grown more lavish in her caresses. The same thing will happen to every loving woman, if she has a husband like Miguel, a little sentimental.

"Last night I woke up between four and five, and without knowing what I did, I was just going to give Julia a kiss, imagining that it was you. Before I did so, I came to my senses. Such keen pain came over me that I cried more than an hour. I don't see why Julia did not wake up. Forgive me for telling you these things, my darling; I am a fool. The main thing is that you are getting along well, as you say, and that you attain your desire. There will still be time, if God is willing, for us to be together. For God's sake, don't neglect to say your prayers when you go to bed."

Each of these letters made our candidate melancholy and thoughtful for a while.

"How glad I should be to give these Caffres their walking-ticket, and go and give a hug to the daughter of my mother-in-law (God bless her!)," he said to himself more than once.

But as his affairs were progressing with 'a fair wind,' he suffered patiently. He wrote to various friends in Madrid to exert themselves for the suspension of the unfriendly *ayuntamientos* above mentioned. Mendoza and others also replied that the President and the ministry gave their consent. Nevertheless, the days passed, and the order did not come.

The Casiña party had on their hands another project for which they were very strenuous, though not to the same degree as the above. This was the highway between Serín and Agüeria, which the inhabitants of both places wished to be put out at public contract. Many times they had made attempts through each faction, but without success. At last the general promised them that he would not cease his endeavors until he had accomplished it; but his departure for Germany had disappointed Don Servando's partisans, who hoped that the district would

owe the benefit to them, and not to the Casona party. But now it came to light that the latter were actively at work in Madrid through the intervention of Corrales, who, as ex-minister and an individual well known in politics, had never ceased to be on friendly terms with the present ministers.

Thereupon, the Casiña party became alarmed, and brought pressure on Miguel to use all his influence again, so that this favor might in nowise be granted to Corrales, but rather to the official candidate whom they supported.

Miguel received word from Madrid that the matter was in a fair way of being settled; later he got another letter in which it was said that the minister had promised to give the order immediately; then came still another which said that the order would appear very soon in the *Gazeta.* Nevertheless, just as in the matter of the suspension, nothing came of it: it failed to appear.

And Don Servando's janizaries, though very certain of victory, began to grow impatient, and to assail Miguel, who, in his turn, was still more vexed by their innuendoes, and felt the most savage inclination to say something impudent in their faces.

One afternoon, when they were as usual drinking beer in Don Servando's office, they heard the sound of a bomb exploding in the air. They suddenly became solemn and silent with their ears pricked up. In a moment another was heard, and some one present said: —

"*They are rockets!*"

"Rockets at this time of day?"

And the seven or eight men present looked at each other in amazement and no little alarm, for the two factions lived in perpetual excitement.

"Is there any special celebration at church to-morrow?"

"No, sir."

"Suppose one of you go out and investigate. . . ."

Two men left the room, and returning in a few moments pale and excited, said, with trembling voices: —

"The rockets are being sent up from the balcony of the Casona."

"Those . . . have received notice about the public contract."

Anxiety and terror seized all hearts: by a simultaneous movement they turned their eyes to the chief, famous for his sagacity.

Don Servando deliberately drank two schooners of beer, and after wiping his lips again and again with his handkerchief, he broke the strained silence, saying: —

"Señor Alcalde, go to the town-house and send two constables to the Casona, and warn them not to send up any more sky-rockets. Article 62 of the Municipal Ordinances forbids their being shot without permission from the authorities."

The janizaries heaved a sigh of relief; not in vain had they placed their trust in their astute chief. The Alcalde went out on his errand, and the others remained discussing the incident, endeavoring to explain how the news had reached the *others* sooner than it had them. The general opinion was that there had been some blunder in the mails.

Don Martín's friends, irritated by the Alcalde's prohibition, collected the village band, which was composed of ten or a dozen instruments, mostly brass, and offering the musicians a good fee besides a *pellejo*[1] of wine, which they showed to inspire them, they made them march up and down the village playing, and then stationed them in the middle of the plaza, where the people, attracted by

[1] A skin dressed and lined with pitch, made for carrying wine.

the music, began to assemble; the lads started a dance, and Don Martín and the highway were cheered.

New and dolorous assault upon the sensibilities of Don Servando's adherents in conclave assembled.

"Señor Alcalde!" said the latter once more, "send and have the music stop! The Municipal Ordinances, articles 59 and 60, require that permission of the authorities should be demanded for this kind of manifestations."

But still Don Martín's followers were not to be cowed. As soon as the order came, feeling secure because the populace, fond of merry-making, supported them, they took the band across the bridge that spans the river there, by a curious accident dividing the municipal limit of Serín from that of Agüeria. From there to the village it would not be fifty steps. Once out of the hostile Alcalde's jurisdiction the music stormed and shrilled in discordant tones, and Don Martín's clients, inspiring the crowd to follow, began once more to organize dances, and indulge in "*vivas.*" Thus passed the afternoon in festive gayety and carousal, while the Casiña party, gathered in their chief's office, tasted the bitterness of defeat, making faces of disgust.

And to cap the climax of misfortunes, *El Occidente*, Don Martín's paper, which happened to be published on the next day, was more than ever insulting, and made sport of them in a cruel fashion.

Serín boasted of two weekly papers: one, *El Occidente*, in the interest of the Casona party, and this appeared on Thursdays; and the other, *La Crónica*, belonging to Don Servando and coming out on Sunday. These were the two serpents to which we made allusion in our description of the Paradise of Serín. *La Crónica* was written almost entirely by an ex-pilot, and consequently nearly all of his jokes were made up of sea terms; he used to call Don

Martín "Martín the Fishing-smack," and his wife "The high board Frigate Doña Manuela," which made all his partisans die with amusement. *El Occidente* was under the direction of a school-master who, to find insults, sought out the most eccentric and extraordinary expressions in the dictionary. That day he called Don Servando "*tozudo y zorrocloco*," which means stupidly obstinate, and one who feigns indisposition so as to conceal his indisposition to work, and he made certain uncomplimentary allusions to Miguel also.

Don Servando took his "*zorrocloco*" philosophically, but Miguel, little wonted to the coarse personalities of village politics, flushed deeply, and declared that 'he was resolved to slap the editor of the scurvy sheet in the face.'

Don Servando's friends looked at him in amazement.

"Gently, gently, my dear sir!" said the latter, with his *inevitable* coolness.

"I should advise you not to do anything of the sort, for that would be the greatest pleasure that you could give them. The judge of 'first claims'[1] is on their side."

"And what have we to do with the judge? The question conerns a matter of honor, which is settled by this person and me fighting with swords or pistols."

The men present looked at him with greater amazement than ever. In Serín there was an absolute lack of knowledge of such proceedings, and consequently it had never entered into their heads that there was to be any fighting. Had Miguel carried out his threat, he would have run a strong risk of being put in jail, and still further incapacitated. He was at last convinced, and gave up his project, although with a bad grace.

The Casona party soon laughed on the other side of the

[1] *Prima instancia.*

cheek. In three days came the order for the suspension of the *ayuntamientos* of Villabona and Agüeria. Then I assure you that there was a carousal and a drinking of beer in the Casiña. Don Servando, in order to banter his enemies, got out the band, and kept it for twelve consecutive hours jangling through the streets. That day the sound of exploding rockets did not for a moment cease in Serín, until the last one was sent off.

By this stroke Miguel's election was made absolutely certain. The Casona party thus understood it, and crest-fallen, they tried as always to curry favor. Only nine days were lacking before the opening of the electorial period. But here it is necessary more than ever to exclaim with the poet: —

> "O instability! O fickle fortune!
> Who doth not hope for thee in hours of sorrow?
> Who doth not fear thee in his hours of comfort?"

Two days before the opening of this period, when the Casiña partisans were going about with glad and careless hearts, and those of the Casona angry and sorrowful; when it was whispered about, and taken for granted that Corrales was going to withdraw, and Miguel was already planning to return to Madrid, as his presence was no longer necessary in the district; lo and behold! there fell into Serín like a bombshell the news that the suspended *ayuntamientos* had been restored.

Unfortunately, the news was correct. Don Servando's friends, after recovering a little from the surprise (since at first no one had found anything to say), came to the conclusion that there was some equivocation, or that some one had lied in Madrid. As there was no telegraph communication with the governor, Miguel decided immediately to hire a carriage and go to the capital in post-haste.

In spite of the exaggerated cordiality with which he was received, and the hearty embraces and his open, frank smile, our candidate saw clearly in the governor's eyes that there was something that was not quite as it should be, and immediately determined to get at the root of the matter as soon as possible. Accordingly, he began to press him with questions, which the Civil Chief of the province answered in vague terms: 'Nothing was known of the reason for this restoration; possibly difficulties had arisen in the Council of State. . . . Perhaps the minister considered the suspension unnecessary for carrying the elections. . . .'

"If the minister has done this on his own responsibility, without the President's support, he has not acted well. Do you suppose that the President has been informed of what has happened?" asked Miguel.

"My dear fellow, I don't know."

"You see I have his formal promise that the government would support me with all the powers at its disposal. Had I not received this pledge, I should never have presented myself as candidate for a district where I was unknown."

"My dear lad, I don't know . . . I don't know. . . ."

"Castro," said Miguel, seizing him firmly by the hand, and looking at him with a severe directness, "you are my friend, and you must tell me the truth. . . . What is up?"

"You will understand perfectly well that my position does not allow me to speak frankly. If I could, I would."

"You are either my friend or you are not. Tell me what is going on," insisted Miguel, energetically.

"Very well then; if you will give me your word as a gentleman not to make any use of it, I will tell you."

"I promise."

"Take warning that it is putting a heavy obligation on yourself."

"I promise you. Speak!"

"We understand that you will not give the slightest hint that you know what I am going to reveal to you. . . . Having noticed for some time, and especially during the last few days, that the minister was weakening on your election, and knowing the friendship that unites you to the President and the conferences which you have had with him, I was anxious to get his advice, so as to know once and for all how I should look upon this matter. Yesterday I telegraphed to his secretary. Here is the answer that I received. . . ."

The governor produced a telegram in cipher, which written out, was as follows: —

Official Candidate — Don Miguel Rivera.

Deputy — Don Manuel Corrales.

Miguel held it for some time in his hands; a melancholy, ironical smile hovered over his lips.

"Very well," said he, flinging it on the table. "One stone more which the world has cast at me."

"I feel it to the bottom of my heart, my boy. The President must have found too much pressure brought to bear upon him. Corrales, you see, is a man of great importance in the present situation! . . . To-morrow he may be minister. . . . And that is the way politics go, my boy. . . . To-day you, and to-morrow me."

"Yes, yes; I see how politics go. The President has given me his word of honor to support my candidacy against Corrales; he has got me to write a host of letters, and to use all sorts of influences; he has forced me to leave my wife and child. The President has done all this with the intention, so it seems, of selling me. I don't know what this is called in politics, but in plain lan-

guage I know that it is called *base*, *vile!*" (accenting the words). "Good by, my boy," he added, offering him his hand. "I shall always be grateful to you for what you have done for me, and the kindly reception which you gave me."

"Hold on," said the governor, as he was going out. "I forgot to tell you that I received a telegram for you that must be from your family."

Miguel was startled.

"What does it say?"

"It must be here; take it."

It was from his stepmother, and read: —

"Come home immediately. You are needed on most urgent business."

Up to a certain point its contents were tranquillizing, for if any one had been ill, it would have said so. But as the import of the message was open to doubt, anxious and sick at heart, he secured a place that very afternoon in the train for Madrid.

XXIII.

Don Alfonso Saavedra's exquisite, overwhelming courtesy, his delicate attentions to every one, his respectful behavior toward ladies masked Satanic pride and boundless impudence. From an early age he had looked upon himself "as the hub of the universe," as the saying goes, and professed absolute scorn of humanity. Among rich young men, the sons of aristocratic families, this conduct is not uncommon. The only thing in which they bear a perpetual resemblance to each other is their scorn of everybody. The majority are not able to go beyond that, and full of zeal, they have no other ambi-

tion than to be able to show their fellows, whenever they can, this most noble disdain, which forms an integral part of their superiority. But so adorable is their frankness that sometimes it obliges them to put up with petty disappointments, and yet it happens that their scorn is not very well appreciated and understood; for among the many absurd whims from which humanity suffers stands that of not allowing itself to be scorned. There is no use in trying to explain this scorn by saying: —

"I owe ninety thousand duros; I am viscount, and hold my head high; I make portentous wagers at baccarat; one of my ancestors blacked King Felipe's boots; I am as good a whip as the head coachman; and a few days ago another viscount and I 'fleeced' a wise man at Vallehermoso; I wear such extraordinary pantaloons that passers-by are obliged to turn round and look at me; and I am in love with a ballet-girl of the Real."

It is idle; humanity is determined not to recognize the importance and seriousness of the reasons wherein these distinguished young men take pleasure in despising it.

Don Alfonso, naturally more cautious and more experienced by his residence in foreign countries, understood that it was expedient to flatter this whim, but at heart he professed the same ideas. That precept of the Krausist philosophy very much in vogue at that time, "Regard humanity not as a means, but as an end," was for him a dead letter.

After the calamity of the Retiro, though his pride was wounded to the very quick, he was able to hide it completely; and if he no longer made his appearance at Miguel's, it was not owing to his resentment, but lest Maximina, now on her guard, would take some violent measure that would compromise him.

She did not perfectly comprehend his character. When

he accidentally met the young couple in the street, he was as polite and genial as ever, excusing his prolonged absence very gracefully by saying that an uncle had suddenly come to town, and he gave a lively and circumstantial description of the occurrence. Saavedra, without being talented or learned, had a peculiarly ludicrous turn of speech, and what he said was apt to be comical and mirth-provoking, though it was often repulsive. When he "used the scalpel" on a friend, the impression that he left on his hearers was painful.

Maximina, on meeting him, turned crimson, and it cost her great effort to calm herself, but fortunately Miguel did not notice it.

The very day that he was going to Galicia, he met Saavedra again at the Ateneo,[1] where the dandy sometimes repaired to read the French periodicals. He told him about his journey, and said good by. Don Alfonso remained a long time seated on the sofa; a frown, constantly growing deeper, furrowed his forehead. Then suddenly he smoothed out the frown; his face regained its ordinary disdainful and indifferent expression, and he got up. There was some deep resolution under that brow; something that was far removed from Krause's commandment, and still less from those of God's law.

At his aunt's house he learned that Julita was going to sleep with her sister-in-law, and spend with her all the time not occupied by her other duties, which consisted of piano and singing lessons. For nothing in the world would *la brigadiera* permit her to relax her four hours of practising and going through the prescribed scales.

Don Alfonso spent four or five days in meditating, in playing espionage on Maximina, and in scheming; meantime he showed himself more than ever amiable and obse-

[1] The Madrid Ateneo or Athenæum, the literary headquarters of Spain.

quious to his cousin; but he refused to accompany her to Miguel's, offering various excuses.

Saturdays he always breakfasted at *la brigadiera's*. On the first Saturday after Miguel's departure, Julita, though she usually took breakfast with Maximina, came home in honor of her cousin, and because it was no longer possible for her to hide the passionate love which she felt for him. During breakfast time he was as jovial and amusing as ever; nevertheless, Julita's loving eyes were able to detect in his gestures a peculiar excitement, as though his mind were preoccupied. Naturally she attributed it to what most concerned her; to the love constantly growing more tender and ardent which her cousin manifested toward her. When they had finished, he asked her in a careless tone: —

"Is your piano teacher coming to-day?"

"Yes; at four."

"Then," said he, still more indifferently, if possible, "you will not return to Maximina's until you have had your lesson, I suppose."

"Of course not . . . there is no need of making the journey twice," replied *la brigadiera*.

They went to the sitting-room, and Julita sat down at the piano with Alfonso at her side. The charming girl struck an opportune *forte* which drowned out the tender words which her cousin began whispering in her ear.

"Julita, your eyes shine so to-day, that if you wanted to set my heart on fire, you could do it this very instant."

"Pedal! pedal!" cried the girl, laughing; and she quenched the dandy's last words with a deafening crash.

She again put on the soft pedal, and began gently to touch the piano. Don Alfonso took advantage of the diminuendo to say: —

"Julita, I adore you; I love you more than my life. . . ."

"Pedal! pedal!" exclaimed the girl again, and she did not allow him to finish. But after a few moments of this rapturous amusement, Don Alfonso exclaimed, raising his hand to his forehead: —

"Oh, how unfortunate!"

"What is it?"

"Why, my uncle is going to Seville to-day, and I have not yet been to the notary's to arrange my mother's papers."

"Oh, you snipe! Hurry! go and get them; you have time."

"Oh, if it were merely a question of getting them! . . . I must look over a good part of them, and add my signature."

"Run, then, lazybones . . . run! . . . You may be sure that your mamma will lay your negligence at my door."

Julita said this, pretending to be angry, but without being able to hide the pleasure that the supposition caused her.

"I was going to spend such a delicious afternoon! And now to have to go to a notary's office to eat dust and make my head ache!"

"Go, go! The first thing to do is the first thing to be done! . . . At any rate, you were in a fair way of telling a good many fibs this afternoon. . . ."

"Honest, genuine truths, cousin divine!"

Don Alfonso's *berlina* was waiting at the corner of the street, according to the orders that he had given the coachman. He lighted an Havana and as he slammed the door to, he said: —

"To the Riveras'."

Any one seeing him leaning back in his carriage, with

his cigar between his teeth, would have taken him for an elegant swell about to have a drive through the Castellana.

Still the same frown, a sign of intense questioning, which had appeared on his brow when he said good by to Miguel at the Ateneo, now furrowed it again, perhaps deeper and darker than ever.

"At six, as always, at the Swiss restaurant," he said to his driver, as he dismounted from the landau.

And with slow step, his face a trifle pale, he entered the doorway of Miguel's house, and mounted the staircase.

He rang the bell vigorously, like a familiar and honored friend.

Plácida came to open for him.

"Señorito, it is good to see you!" she exclaimed, with the sympathy inspired in maid-servant by visitors when they are handsome men.

"*Holá!* little one," said the *caballero*, in a condescending tone, giving her a little pat on the cheek; "your master in?"

"But don't you know that the señorito went last Monday to Galicia? It is plain enough that you don't often soil the staircase of this house with the dust of your boots."

"*La señorita?*" asked the fine gentleman, with an absent-minded gesture, at the same time depositing his cane and hat on the rack.

"She is sewing in her boudoir. . . . Shall I take up your card?"

"There is no need," he replied, starting with a firm step toward the parlor, and opening the boudoir door.

Maximina was sewing on some article of clothing for the baby, who, absolutely removed from the political

struggles in which his papa was engaged, was sleeping in the bedroom, and occupying a good half of the bed. The young mother's thoughts were flying over the white peaks of the Guadarrama, traversing the desert plains of Castille, and losing themselves among the leafy groves of Galicia.

"Will he have socks enough?" she was asking herself, at that moment. This had been a serious anxiety to Maximina ever since her husband's departure. "Eight pairs aren't sufficient, can't be sufficient, if he changes them every day, as he usually does. In that country I believe they don't wash clothes very often. Ay! *Diós mio!* and if it should rain, and he get his feet wet! how could he change them two or three times a day as he does here? . . . I am sure that it would never occur to him to buy some new ones. . . . He is very thoughtless!"

The door-bell rang. As she raised her head, her eyes met Don Alfonso's.

It is difficult to conceive the surprise that Maximina felt at that sudden apparition, and the surprise and terror that took possession of her. She turned pale, even livid, then her face grew crimson, then once more pale; all in the space of a few seconds.

Saavedra shut the door, and offered her his hand with perfect ease and self-possession.

"How are you, Maximina?"

She could scarcely articulate her answer. Her hand trembled violently.

"What does this mean? You are trembling," said the *caballero*, retaining it a moment in his.

She made no reply.

"If it were an enemy who came in, I should understand this agitation; but as I am such a devoted friend . . . so stupidly devoted as I am to you. . . . I am wrong to call

myself a friend: I should do better to call myself your slave, for these many days you have exercised an absolute dominion over me."

The young wife's features were contracted by a smile which seemed rather like a face of terror. Her eyes expressed the same dismay. She tried to say something, but her voice died in her throat.

"The last time that I spoke with you, Maximina," the Andalusian went on to say, after he had taken a seat at her side, "I was bold enough to give you a hint of what was passing within my heart. Perhaps I was foolish; but the step has been taken, and I cannot retrace it. I must complete to-day what then I did not do more than indicate; I must express to you,—although it is very difficult—the love, the idolatry that you inspire in me, the terrible anxieties which I have been suffering for more than a month, the state of genuine madness to which your cruelty has brought me. . . ."

Maximina continued speechless. She looked like a statue of Desolation.

"I am going to tell you all, all! You will pardon me, will you not, lovely Maximina?"

And the audacious *caballero* pronounced these words with his insinuating, mellow voice, at the same time gently laying the palm of his hand on the back of Maximina's. She withdrew it as though she had touched a vile animal; and leaping to her feet, as though pushed by a spring, she ran to the door, and hastened into the parlor.

Don Alfonso followed her, and caught her by her arm. Then, pulling herself away with remarkable power, she broke from his touch, but, instead of running, she faced him with flaming cheeks, looking at him with frenzied eyes that were frightful to see.

The truth is, that among the many attitudes which he had imagined that Miguel's wife might assume, Saavedra had never thought of such an one. He expected repulses, indignant phrases, even insulting words, and he was prepared to meet them with a cold and careless mien; he expected to be commanded to go on the instant, he expected the threat that she would shout, and he was likewise prepared with what to say to calm her immediately; finally, in the depths of his heart, his presumption flattered him by saying that Maximina could not long resist his attraction and his fame as a seducer. But these strange, inconvenient flights, this mute terror, surprised and somewhat disconcerted him.

"What are you going to do, Maximina," he asked, though the poor child was not doing anything; but it was well to warn her for some event. — "If you should cry or call your servants, you would be seriously compromised; there would be a scandal, everybody would know about it, including your husband, and you would lose much more than you have any idea of. . . . Come now, be reasonable," he added, in the same mellow voice in which he had spoken before, and approaching her. "The thing is not worth taking in this tragic fashion. It is not strange that I am desperately in love with you, nor am I to blame for it, but the God who made you so beautiful, so sweet, so *simpática*. . . . And if you should grant me one little favor — let me kiss one hand as a reward for so much adoration, for so many sad and bitter hours which I have suffered during the last month, I think it would not be very strange, either. It would be on your part not a proof of love, which I know well I do not deserve, but rather of your kind heart, of your generous nature which, even on such an occasion as this, cannot be forsworn. This favor, though insignificant in the world's eyes and

before your conscience, would be in mine immense; it would be a secret between us two until death. . . . My gratitude for it would be eternal. . . . Come, lovely Maximina, don't give the lie to your goodness. . . . I beg it of you on my knees. Let me touch my lips to your hand, and go away calm and happy. . . . Do you wish greater humiliation than this?"

The audacious and astute *caballero*, in saying these last words, in reality bent his knee, and seized one of the young woman's hands. But she snatched it away with surprising bravery, and glanced around with a face full of terror, as though seeking for aid. Then she went like a flash to Miguel's study. Don Alfonso followed her, likewise running. The young woman took her stand behind the table, and once more cast upon him that timid and uncertain glance, in reality like that of one insane.

Miguel had left open on the table his shaving case, and the razor that he had used lay on top, also open.

By a refinement of affection Maximina had been unwilling to touch these objects or to allow any one else to do so, but left them till his return. She quickly seized the razor, and laying it to her throat, she said in a hoarse voice: —

"If you touch me again, I will kill myself! I will kill myself!"

These were the first words that she spoke during the whole scene, though it lasted several minutes.

The tone in which she spoke and the look with which she accompanied her words, left no room for doubt. Saavedra knew that though she would not kill herself, yet that she would give herself a slash, that the blood would run, and that there would be a serious piece of mischief in which he would appear in no enviable light. Therefore he hastened to say: —

"I will not touch you; don't be afraid." And then he added with an ironical smile, in a tone overflowing with spite, "Come, come! where it is least to be expected there arises a Lucretia. If I were an artist, Maximina, I would paint you this way with your arm raised, and would send you to the exhibition. The razor is a trifle prosaic, but that is the fault of the times. Lucretias nowadays, instead of an embossed dagger use their husbands' razor!"

Perhaps the rejected seducer would have gone on flinging at his expected victim other coarse insults and cowardly jests like the above, but at that instant Maximina's quick ear caught the soft and delicate voice of her little one, who was just waking up in the sleeping-room; it was so slight a sound that only a mother could have heard it at that distance.

She threw down the razor, and exclaimed, "My heart's delight, I am coming."

She flew like an arrow past Don Alfonso. If he had attempted to stay her flight, she would certainly have knocked him over with the impetus that she had and her muscular development.

The *caballero* had no thought of doing any such thing. What he did was to turn on his heels, take his hat, and set out to dissipate his ill humor and vexation on the Castellana.

Maximina's calmness quickly returned. Nevertheless, a few hours afterward she began to feel such an intense chill that she was obliged to go to bed and ask for a cup of *tila*. On the following day she was all right again. She thought of sending word to Miguel, asking him to come home, but on second thought she saw that she would be obliged to give some reason, and she had none. And if he should have any suspicion and oblige her to confess

what had taken place? He would certainly challenge Saavedra, who, as he was an expert in such affairs, would kill him.

"Oh, I would kill myself sooner than tell him!"

And the faithful wife, at the mere thought of it, shivered with horror.

XXIV.

"THE first part of my plan has 'gang agley'; now let us see if I shall be luckier in the second," said Don Alfonso, on leaving Miguel's house.

That afternoon, while his eyes were wandering at haphazard over the throng of carriages flying up and down the Castellana, he was deeply engaged in concocting the most odious and villanous plans, which we shall shortly find him carrying into execution.

During the days that followed, he began to show more attention and love to his cousin than ever, spending long hours in her company. This sudden ardor on her lover's part was sufficient to turn Julita's head completely. The asperity of her restless and ardent temperament had already for some time been changing into mildness. Don Alfonso, owing to *la brigadiera's* blameworthy carelessness, had got into the habit of taking certain liberties with her, innocent enough in themselves, but extremely dangerous. When he had made her his slave, he asked her one day: —

"Julita, do you want to marry me?"

"What a question!" exclaimed the girl, growing crimson as a poppy.

"Well, then, let us have it understood that you accept me as your husband."

"Who told you so, jackanapes."[1]

[1] *Majadero.*

"You have told me with those sharp eyes of yours ever since I knew you! You can't deny it, Julia!"

"*Tonto! tonto!* you insufferable fellow!" exclaimed the girl, trying to be angry.

"Let us not speak any more of that. That matter is settled. In the first place, we have both agreed, La Señorita Doña Julia Rivera on the one hand, and Don Alfonso Saavedra on the other, that we wish to enter into wedlock. Now then, how to carry our project into effect? I have already reached the twenty-fifth year of my age — if you did not know it before, you know it now." (Julia laughed.) "Consequently the law authorizes me to marry whenever I wish, without my mother's consent. Still this permission is indispensable for me, in the first place, on account of the frantic affection which she professes for me; on account of the duty that I owe her of not going against her wishes or causing her a grief which the poor woman does not deserve; and in the second place, through a selfish consideration, which is likewise of much weight. I have been a wretch, Julita; a prodigal who has in a few years run through the fortune that I inherited from my father. The result of that is that I now find myself at my mother's mercy, and she, be it said in the interest of truth, has not hitherto been niggardly toward me. But as you can easily imagine, I don't know what might happen if I married against her wishes. Now then, I confess with shame, I am not used to working, nor even if I wanted to work should I know what to set my hand to. So then, we must tell my mamma, if we are to get married. To-morrow I will write her, and if, as I have no reason to doubt, she has no objection to our marriage, we can immediately set the time for it."

What a sleepless night Julita spent! and yet how happy a night it was!

Don Alfonso took it for granted that their marriage was settled, and even spoke of it as though it had already taken place. The talks which they had during the four days which elapsed between the letter and its answer were almost all concerned with the preparations to be made for the wedding, — what they would do after they were joined, etc. Julia waited impatiently for the mamma's answer from Seville. As for *la brigadiera*, as Don Alfonso was her right eye, she had never taken her into consideration at all. By his advice she had not said a word to her about it as yet.

At last the letter came.

Would that it had never come! Saavedra entered his aunt's house with his face pale and dark lines under his eyes, and with a mortal sadness depicted on it. In order to accomplish this theatrical effect he had spent the previous night in a drunken spree. Julia's face changed when she saw him; then instantly she knew by intuition what news he had brought. When they had taken their seat together by the piano, the place where they had carried on almost all their secret conversations, the *caballero* exclaimed in a tone full of sorrow, and hiding his face in his hands: —

"How unhappy I am, Julita!"

She was silent for a few moments, and then said: —

"Your mother does not consent to our marriage, — is that it?"

Don Alfonso did not reply. Silence reigned for some time. Finally Julia broke it in a trembling voice: —

"Don't take it so to heart, Alfonso. Instead of helping me, you take away my courage."

"You are right, my beauty! even in this I am selfish. I ought to consider that beside the grief that you feel as keenly as I do, if you love me, you have had an insult put upon you."

"No, no," the young girl hastened to say; "I do not feel that it is an insult. All I feel is that I cannot be yours."

Saavedra gave her a fascinating look of love, and pressed her hand warmly.

"Mamma does not speak unkindly of you. If she had said anything that could be construed as derogatory to you, I should know well how to reply to it. It will be better for you to read her letter for yourself," he said, taking it from his pocket.

This letter had been written by Saavedra himself, counterfeiting her penmanship and sending it to a friend to be mailed back from Seville; it was a document remarkable for its ingenuity. Julia's name was not mentioned in it; the mamma deeply lamented, because she had dreamed of a brilliant match for her dear boy; he well knew who she was. This had been the hope of all her life, she had pledged her word, and all the relatives were counting upon it; finally, that as now she was getting old and feeble, this disappointment would certainly cause her death.

The effect caused by this letter on the young girl was exactly what its author intended. Instead of quenching the fire, it made it burn all the more fiercely; jealousy was the principal fuel in this case.

"Who is the woman whom they want you to marry, Alfonso?" asked Julita timidly, while big tears rolled down her cheeks.

"I don't know, I don't know, let me alone!" he exclaimed, with a gesture of despair.

"Tell me, Alfonso: I am very anxious to know."

"What difference does it make who she is? I hate her, I detest her."

"At any rate, I want to know what her name is."

"She is the Countess de San Clemente."

"Is she young?"

"Much older than you are: she is at least twenty-five or twenty-six."

"Is she pretty?"

"How do I know? What difference does it make to me whether she is pretty or homely?"

"But *is* she pretty?"

"They say she is; but I tell you that it makes no difference to me."

The girl was silent for a long time; her heart beat violently. At length she said in a melancholy tone, giving her lover an anxious look: —

"They will persuade you, Alfonso. At last you will agree to marry her."

The Andalusian *caballero* looked at her with an angry face, and exclaimed with energy: —

"They might tear me in pieces before such a thing happened!"

"You cannot be perfectly sure of it," said she, looking at him with the same anxiety; "they will continue working at you, working at you; they will get you so entangled that finally there will be no way out of it but to yield."

"No, I swear to you, no! Come, don't speak any more of this, Julita, for this sort of talk annoys me very much."

For a moment the young girl's eyes sparkled joyfully. Then the same expression of unhappiness came back into them.

Five or six days passed. Don Alfonso redoubled his manifestations of affection. Nevertheless, such oppressive unhappiness weighed upon the lovers that they were obliged to remain long moments in silence, with their heads down and their eyes fixed on vacancy. Julita often shed tears, and Saavedra, also overwhelmed with sorrow

put forth useless efforts to console her. The truth was they saw no way out of their difficulties. The horizon was absolutely shut in and dark.

"I haven't any profession whatever," said the *caballero*. "If we were to marry, we should starve to death. . . . That is the result of having educated me for a rich man!"

"As for starving to death, I don't believe it," said Julita, her face deeply flushing. "Mamma and I are not rich, but we can live decently. . . . It is clear that for you who are accustomed to another sort of life, it would be very hard . . . but . . ."

"Oh, don't speak of that, Julia!" exclaimed the *caballero*, with the gesture of a man whose dignity was wounded. . . . "It is lowering me too much to believe that I could consent for you to support me. . . . But even if I were so low as that, still I could not do it, because I do not want to be my mother's murderer."

The girl said no more, and, as often before, the tears began to slide down her cheeks.

"Does your mother have any suspicion of what is going on?"

"No."

"Then be very careful. You know as well as I do how peculiar she is; if she had a suspicion that my mamma objected, she would spoil the whole business, and I should never consent to set my foot in this house again."

One evening, after quite a number of days had passed, the *caballero* came with his face brighter than it had been for some time. Instead of sitting down near the piano, the lovers went and stood in the bay-window. After painting things in very black colors as usual and lamenting a long time, Don Alfonso said to his cousin: —

"As I have been thinking of nothing else than this all

day and all night, certain means of escaping from this difficulty have occurred to me. I have not told them to you, for they are very absurd. Still, as last night I was walking up and down my room without being able to sleep, one scheme came into my head, and this one is very sure but very bold . . . so much so that I am afraid to tell it to you."

"Is it so bad as all that?"

"Bad, no; but bold. It requires you to disregard certain social conventions and to show a great will power."

"Come, then, tell me. I am very curious to hear about it."

"Very well then, Julia; mamma, though you imagine her to be a hard woman, because of your childish recollections and because in reality she has a cold and serious exterior which prejudices against her, has a heart that is in reality very warm. She has given me unequivocal proofs of it, oftentimes forgiving me almost too quickly for very serious faults. Her character is as haughty as your mamma's; but these natures are easy to overcome; to make them yield it needs only that you humiliate yourself. . . . This is what I was thinking of last night:— If Julia had the courage to make a decided stroke and elope with me to Seville and present ourselves before her, I am certain that she would not hesitate to forgive us and grant us her blessing. No woman, however bad she is, would consent to let the daughter of her own cousin be dishonored."

"This scheme is madness. I cannot believe that you would propose to me such an atrocious thing!"

"I do not propose it. All I do is to report to you a thought which occurred to me. If I cannot tell you what my heart feels and what passes through my mind, whom shall I tell it to, Julia *mia?*"

"This is the last thing that you ought to have conceived!"

"I have thought so much that it is not strange if it were the last thing that I did conceive. The project would be very audacious, violent, and repugnant to you, but not a piece of folly as you say; it is a certain, infallible means of attaining what we desire."

"Well, then, even if it is certain and infallible, I will not hear to it, do you understand?"

Don Alfonso did not give up conquered. He continued to argue the point, not losing his calmness, adducing reasons, mentioning various examples which he had already prepared, and in a thousand skilful ways overcoming Julia's scruples. But even when the girl found herself cornered, captured in the net of her lover's sophistries, she suddenly grew angry and exclaimed, "Well, even if it be as you say, still I don't like it, I don't like it, and that is sufficient!"

Julia, though endowed with a rash and impetuous nature, had an undisturbed conscience; she was a good girl and that was the very reason why this scheme deeply wounded her sense of propriety. Nevertheless, Saavedra kept constantly tormenting her with the hope of shaking her.

The afternoon was now declining; the boudoir began to fill with shadows. Don Alfonso had at last exhausted all the powers at his command, and was still far from attaining his end.

"Very well," said he after a long silence, doing his best to hide his scorn and giving his words a peculiarly melancholy intonation, "I have eagerly tried to find some way of escaping from the painful situation in which we are. I propose to you the only practicable and certain method. You yourself have seen that it was so and you have comprehended the necessity of adopting some ener-

getic plan. And yet you refuse to accept it. I respect the scruples which you entertain in regard to it, but you will permit me to tell you that the woman who really and truly loves will rise above them. If the love that you had for me were as great as you say . . ."

"Alfonso!"

"I know well that you love me — don't go to protesting. . . . But the fact is, that though we love each other very much, we are very unhappy and we find no way of escaping from it. What is left for us to do? Nothing but to part and never see each other again."

"O Alfonso!"

"Yes, Julia, yes; it must be: we must separate, and forever. Here all that we do is to torment ourselves cruelly. It is an infernal life to have happiness before our eyes and not be able to touch it. Before proposing this last recourse, — which is very harsh to be sure, — but absolutely indispensable, — I firmly decided to leave the country, in case you did not accept it. So to-morrow I take the train for Paris. I confess frankly I have not the strength to endure this tormenting situation."

The astute *caballero* ceased speaking. Julia likewise was silent: a melancholy pallor spread over her lovely face; her eyes were fixed wildly on a point of space, and she sat motionless as a statue. Don Alfonso left her in this situation a long time without disturbing her eager and anxious thoughts, though he kept looking at her. Her pallor kept growing more and more pronounced.

When he felt that the right moment had arrived, the wily seducer went to take his hat which he had laid on the piano, and returning to the girl, and holding out his hand, he said in a trembling voice: —

"*Adiós*, Julia!"

She retained it a moment, and then, giving him a desperate look, her face being now livid, said: —

"Don't go, Alfonso. Do with me what you please. I am ready to follow you."

The *caballero*, after assuring himself that his aunt could not see them, long held her tightly enfolded in his arms.

XXV.

"Boy, bring me a glass of *limon*. . . . Bring me two, do you hear?"

The banker was choking. He was a short, stout man, with extremely red cheeks. He unbuttoned his shirt collar and went on shuffling the cards, all the time snorting furiously, as though he were threatened by some apoplectic attack.

"Game."

The players made their play, laying their stakes beside the cards. A gloved hand placed a package of bills on one of them.

"How much of that do you bet, Saavedra?" asked the fat gambler, lifting his eyes which were full of terror and seemed to ask for mercy.

"All," replied the Andalusian *caballero* dryly.

"How much is there?"

"I don't know."

His tone was depreciative enough. However, the banker seemed not to mind it: he took the package and began to count it under the watchful eyes of the group of players who were gathered around the table, some seated, some standing.

"There are forty-one thousand reals."

"There is not enough in the bank," said one player, stretching out his hand for his stake.

"My credit is good for it," replied the banker, grow-

ing redder and redder; it seemed as though he were going to burst. While the banker was distributing the cards, absolute silence reigned. Don Alfonso's was a seven.

"That is the end of it," said the banker, with ill-concealed dismay, throwing the pack down on the table.

Immediately he began to pay the smaller stakes, leaving Saavedra's till the last. When he came to him there were left only twenty-nine thousand reals.

"I shall owe you twelve thousand," said he, handing over all that he had.

Don Alfonso took it and thrust it into his pocket angrily. The game was over. The banker, mopping the sweat from his forehead with his handkerchief, went over to the Andalusian, who had taken his seat on a sofa, and was calmly reading a newspaper.

"You have fifteen thousand duros in your pocket, my boy."

"I don't know," replied Don Alfonso, without looking up.

"But I know: Villar and González lost nine thousand, and we more than twelve thousand. All the rest put together did not take six thousand."

"Pish! it is quite possible," replied the *caballero*.

"Any one to see your face would say that what you carried in your pocket was fifteen thousand stones. See here, lend me thirty thousand reals, and that will put you in good humor."

Don Alfonso, without saying a word, took out his pocket-book, and gave him a handful of bills.

"Saavedra, you are on the downward track. The other evening I saw you in a box at the theatre making love to a mighty pretty girl. Be careful! on the day least expected you will be getting married."

Don Alfonso took out his watch, and, after looking at it, smiled coldly, saying: —

"At this very moment I am going to run away with that same little girl. I am going abroad with her."

"I would not sell myself cheap," replied the other, without once thinking that it might be true. "But you would soon get tired of it. You and I are just alike; we are too old for such escapades."

"Good by, Gubells."

"Good by, my boy. Don't fail to be on hand to-night, for there is going to be a game of golfe."

"Haven't I told you that I am going to run away with that little girl?" rejoined the *caballero* at the door, with the same cold smile on his lips.

"A nice little piece! . . . Come back as soon as you can . . . won't you? and don't fail to bring the marquis if you meet him."

Saavedra slowly descended the carpeted staircase of the Círculo. As he went into the street it was already growing dark. His *berlina* was waiting for him at the door.

"See here, Julián! take me now to the Calle de Carretas, stop there, and wait near the mail-box. A señora will come, she will open the door, and get in with me. As soon as this occurs, without a moment's delay drive like an arrow for Jetafe. You are well acquainted with the road, aren't you? Good! then it will be necessary, even though you wind the horses, to get us there in a jiffy. I want to catch the train that leaves there at half-past eight. Don't you be troubled at the adventure; it is a ballet girl from the Real who wants to go with me to Seville, and I cannot break my word. When we reach Jetafe I will give you further instructions about what you are to do."

The carriage reached the Calle de Carretas, and drew up where its owner had commanded. Don Alfonso leaned back in one corner so as to avoid the glances of the passers-by, and waited.

Julia had been spending the afternoon at her sister-in-law's, for that day she happened not to have a piano lesson; she was all the time in a state of nervous excitement, which Maximina was not slow to notice.

"What is the matter? Do you feel ill?" she asked.

"No. What makes you ask? What do you see in me that is strange?" she demanded, full of alarm.

"Nothing, nothing! don't be disturbed. You are a trifle paler than usual, and there are circles under your eyes, nothing more."

"Oh, I think that I am a little nervous to-day."

Maximina smiled good-naturedly, supposing that she might have had some falling out with her lover, and so she ordered some *tila* to be made for her.

In spite of the deep antipathy which she felt for Don Alfonso and the strong reasons that she had for considering him a miscreant, she saw that Julita was so desperately in love with him that she could not bring herself to say a word against him.

As the afternoon wore on, her restlessness increased. The youngest offshoot of the race of the Riveras was many times on the point of suffering in some slight degree in consequence of his noble aunt's nervous condition. She hugged him to her heart tighter than was necessary; she tossed him up into the air and caught him again; she gave him hundreds of kisses on the same spot in his face until it burned brighter than a coal, and even — horrible thing — bit his nose. There is no need of saying that the illustrious baby, swelling with indignation, protested against such treatment.

The young girl likewise showed herself more tenderly affectionate toward Maximina than usual.

"Maximina, how good you are! how good you are!"

And she almost squeezed her to death in her arms.

"I wish I were. I should like to be good," replied the young wife, blushing.

"How much I would give to be like you, Maximina!"

"If you weren't better, you would be a pretty poor specimen."

"Oh! I am bad, Maximina, very bad! . . . But you will forgive all my failings, won't you?"

And struck by a sudden inspiration, she jumped up, saying: —

"I am going to the study to write a letter."

"Aren't you going to drink your *tila?*"

"Certainly I will take it; I will finish it afterward."

She went to her brother's writing-room, and began in all haste to pen the following note: —

"My dearest Maximina, my soul's sister: When you receive this, poor Julia will already have committed a great sin. I am going to Seville with Alfonso to beg his mother's permission for us to marry. Try to pacify . . ."

"Julia, your *tila* is getting cold," said Maximina, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder.

Julia uttered a cry, and covered the paper with her hands.

Maximina stepped back in consternation.

"Excuse me; dear, you took me so by surprise," said Julia, smiling and very rosy.

"I am the one to ask pardon for having come in without knocking. . . . I did not think . . . Go on, go on . . ." she added, with a mischievous smile that signified: "I know whom the letter is for!"

How far the innocent young woman was from suspecting the truth!

After she left the room, Julia finished her letter: . . .

"Try to pacify mamma, and Miguel when he comes back. I think that in the end all will be satisfactorily arranged. Alfonso, though he is a little cold, is a perfect gentleman. Pardon and love your sister who takes her farewell of you alone. — *Julia.*"

Don Alfonso had charged her again and again, and with great forethought, not for anything in the world to leave a written letter giving an intimation of where she was going. But by an impulse of her heart, — one of the many that are inexplicable, — it occurred to her to write to her sister-in-law, in whom she had perfect confidence.

"I am going now," she said, putting on a hat which had a thick veil to let down over her eyes. "It is dinner time already, and mamma will be expecting me. Just think! I have not seen her since last evening. I shall be back here again at ten o'clock."

They said good by at the door. Maximina gave her a kiss on her cheek as usual; she repaid it with a dozen so eager and affectionate that the young wife could not help exclaiming with a laugh: —

"How crazy you are!"

"Crazy? yes! and very crazy," she replied, as she went down the stairs, not turning her head.

Her kisses and the accent of those last words somewhat surprised Maximina, but she did not give much thought to them, and shut the door.

Juana was to accompany the young girl to her mother's. When they reached the street, it was almost night. On coming to the Calle de Carretas, the señorita said: —

"Juana, do me the favor to go into that tobacconist's and get a stamp and drop this letter into the box. . . . Can you read?" she added, fearing that she might notice to whom it was directed.

"No, señorita," replied the maid,[1] abashed. She went into the tobacconist's, and Julia made her believe that she would wait for her at the door; but as soon as she saw her approach the counter, she ran down the street, and on reaching the carriage, the horses of which she knew, she opened the door and slipped in. Immediately a man's voice was heard to say: —

"Drive hard, Julián, drive hard!"

The horses, lashed by the coachman, dashed along the avenue; they soon left behind them the centre of population, and galloped half frantically down Andalucía Avenue.

When they reached Jetafe, the train was already whistling in the distance. Don Alfonso bought tickets, and calling Julián aside, said: —

"To-morrow, if you should be asked, say that you drove me to Pozuelo for the train on the Northern Line; do you understand?"

"Depend upon me, señorito."

"Here," said he, giving him some bank-notes. "Take good care of the horses. I will shortly write you what you are to do."

The train rapidly carried the fugitives away, not toward Seville, but to Lisbon. At midnight, the *caballero* having stepped out a moment, came back with a look of annoyance, saying that he had made a mistake, that they ought to have changed cars farther back. The girl was stupefied and dismayed.

"Don't be so much alarmed, dear. Now instead of staying in some large town on this side where they might get knowledge of us by telegraph, it would be better for us to go into Portugal, and from there go directly to Seville."

[1] The Guipuzcoana, native of the province of Guipúzcoa.

Although the girl protested violently, she had no other remedy than to consent.

When they reached Lisbon, they took rooms at one of the best hotels. Don Alfonso promised his cousin to take her the next day to Seville. But a day passed, and then a second and third, and they did not depart. The *caballero* found one special pretext for postponing the journey. And this was that he had lost his luggage. He was waiting for the arrival of the telegram that he sent about it.

Julita during these days found herself in a state of great excitement, so that she passed instantly and alternately from noisy and unreasonable gayety to deep and extravagant melancholy. Sometimes she grew angry with her cousin and overwhelmed him with taunts and threatened to escape alone or to inform the police; then she would throw herself into his arms and ask his pardon. In the midst of the deepest sadness her lover would begin to mimic in grotesque fashion the accent of the maid who served them, and the girl would laugh like a lunatic. At other times she grew enthusiastic at the view of the bay and the royal palace of Cintra.

The wily *caballero* humored her with the most delicate and affectionate attentions. When she lost her temper, he would allow her to recover from it without saying a word; when she was sad, he would do everything to enliven her; when finally he saw that she looked contented, he would take advantage of such moments to go out to walk with her, giving her his arm as though they were husband and wife. They were regarded as a newly married couple by the people at the hotel.

Nevertheless, on the fourth day of their visit, as they were in their sitting-room after breakfast, Don Alfonso leaning back in an easy-chair, smoking his cigar, she standing in front of the mirror getting ready to go out, the

caballero said, accompanying his words with an ambiguous smile:—

"Do you know what I am thinking, Julita?"

"No; what?"

"That I am greatly delighted with this way of living with you!"

"But I am not," replied the young girl, dryly.

"Why, what objection do you have to it?"

"I object to living in a state of mortal sin; I wish to ask mamma's pardon and to be married to you."

"Now the very thing that I enjoy most is living in this extra-legal way. We are two birds flown from the nest and winging our flight through the air. How jolly it is to be so alone and so free! Could we possibly be happier because a dirty and ignorant priest had jabbered a few Latin words before us?"

Julita, on hearing this and noticing the somewhat mocking tone in which Don Alfonso spoke, felt a cold chill run down her back, and she dropped her arms which she had raised to arrange her hair. She stood a moment or two in suspense, and then turning her pale face toward him, she said deliberately, in an unnatural voice:—

"It seems to me that I could not have heard such coarse and vile words come from your mouth."

"Why do you call them vile, child? All that I did was to give you my opinion without taking the trouble to consider whether it was good or bad," replied the *caballero* laughing.

"Hush! hush! Alfonso. . . . There are moments when my imagination is filled with ideas so horrible that if they stayed long I am certain that I should go mad and throw myself out of the window."

As she said this, she flung her hat on the toilet table and came and sat down on the sofa, remaining with her

head sunk low and her hands crossed in meditative attitude. Great tears began to roll down her cheeks.

"Crying?" asked the *caballero*, approaching her.

The girl raised her eyes gleaming with fury and looked at him.

"Crying! yes!" she said in an exasperated tone. "And why not? What do you care for my tears? I wish to go home immediately! do you hear? I wish to go now . . . this very instant."

"Calm yourself, Julia."

"I do not wish to calm myself. Why am I here with you, I should like to know? Do me the favor to take me home again. Though my mother should kill me, I wish to go to her instantly, do you hear?"

Don Alfonso made no answer; he wisely allowed a few minutes to pass so that she might recover a little. Then he said in a muffled and melancholy voice: —

"Well then, if you are already tired of me I will take you back to Madrid again. . . . I supposed that your love was a little more substantial. . . . I made a mistake. Patience. . . . My conscience does not reproach me in the least. Since we left Madrid I have done all that I could to treat you in a straightforward manner. Circumstances brought us here and have retained us against my will. . . . However, we will start as soon as you like. The truth is, we have waited long enough for that miserable luggage. . . . Now I am going to tell you something," he added in a broken voice. "If in any respect during these last days I have done anything to hurt your feelings, forgive me. I love you and regard you as my lawful wife, because you are in the sight of God and you will be very soon before men . . . that is, if you accept me as a husband and do not return."

Julia, likewise moved, gave him her hand which he hastened to kiss.

They became reconciled.

"Is it your wish that we go to-day?" asked Saavedra, after a moment, in an indifferent tone.

"We will wait till to-morrow. . . . Perhaps the luggage will come to-day," replied the young woman, anxious to make him forget her severe words.

"Come on, then, let us have a walk along the bay. It is a lovely afternoon. We will engage a felucca."[1]

"Oh yes, yes, Alfonso! I am dying for a sail!" cried Julia, clapping her hands.

"On the way you can buy the clothing that you need."

Julia, now gay as a lark, once more went to the mirror to arrange her hair.

"You can't imagine, Alfonso, how I enjoy sailing in a boat. And if there is a little swell, all the better. I am never seasick. Three years ago, mamma and I went from Santander to Bilbao. . . ."

Just as she said those words she uttered a terrible cry, one of those that make the hair stand on end and freeze the blood of those who hear it; her comb fell from her hands; her eyes, fastened on the mirror, expressed terror and dismay.

She had seen in the mirror the door of the room open, and her brother Miguel come in.

XXVI.

On reaching Madrid, and learning what had happened, Miguel's heart was wounded by the cruellest dart that fate had hurled at him since his father's death. He found his step-mother in a state of desperation bordering on imbecility. That proud and indomitable nature had at last

[1] *Falua.*

been bent. And as always happened when he saw her in the depths and silently weeping, he felt a double compassion. "Poor mamma!" he said, folding her in his arms. "The stroke is severe, but still all is not yet lost. The affair may yet be arranged, with God's aid."

"No, Miguel, no; my heart tells me that it cannot be arranged. This man is a villain. I did not heed your warning, and God has punished me."

Maximina was greatly upset to find that her husband was going to start that same evening for Seville. "No, no; I do not want you to go," she exclaimed, clinging convulsively to him.

"Maximina, this is not worthy of you," replied Miguel gently. "My sister has been abducted, and aren't you willing for me to go in search of her?"

"And if that man should kill you? You see he is capable of doing anything!"

"Why should he kill me? I am going to Seville merely to search for my sister. As I imagine that he will not refuse to give her up to me, I shall be back with her by day after to-morrow. The rest will be arranged afterward."

"Will you give me your word that you are going for no other purpose? That you will not provoke a quarrel with him?"

"I will."

The brigadier's son did not mean what he said. Who will blame him for that?

When the moment for his departure came, his wife, breaking into tears, obliged him once more to repeat his oath. Then holding him by the hands, she said to him: —

"Promise me also that you will be kind to Julia; that you will not say a harsh word to her."

"That I also agree to."

With these two promises Maximina allowed him to go. Then she went to the window, and lifting her baby in her arms, showed him to his father, as though still further to compel him not to expose his life.

On reaching Seville, Miguel found that his sister and Don Alfonso had not been there. He called on Saavedra's mother, and was painfully surprised to learn that this lady had known nothing of the deed done by her son, nor even that he had been paying attentions to Julia. All Miguel's doubts vanished. Saavedra had eloped with his sister to make her his . . . His mind refused even to express the word.

The first thing that he considered after he had grown a little calmer was to find where he had taken her, since they were not in Seville. It occurred to him that they might have gone to Cadiz, and taken a steamer from there. But after making some inquiries he found that this hypothesis was not supported. Then he determined to return, and ask at all the stations of the road if possibly any one there remembered seeing that couple, a very accurate description of whom he was able to give. He found nothing about them until he reached the station of Algodor.

There a porter remembered having taken from one car to another such a *caballero* with a young lady such as Miguel described. One sure thing — the *caballero* had given him the fabulous fee of a duro, and this in fact contributed no little to his having remembered.

As the railway to Andalucía separates at this station from that of Estramadura and Portugal, Miguel felt a strong suspicion, almost amounting to certainty, that they had gone in this latter direction, and he took a ticket for Lisbon. On reaching there he proceeded to ask at the principal hotels after the young Spanish couple, taking it

for granted that, if they were there, they would be settled at one of them. In fact, he came upon their track after he had made three or four inquiries.

"Are they at home, or have they gone out?"

"I have not seen them go out," replied the porter in Portuguese. "Does your lordship wish me to announce you?"

"There is no need. I am her brother. What number is the room!"

"Number 16, second floor."

With terrible emotion, such as can be imagined, the brigadier's son went into the hotel, and passed through the corridors until he reached the number indicated. He paused at the door to calm his heart, which was throbbing violently: he listened, and could distinguish his sister's voice. With trembling hand he lifted the latch and entered.

Julia, on seeing him in the mirror, gave that tremendous shriek of which we have spoken; then she turned and threw herself at his feet. Miguel gently lifted her, and took her to the sofa. Then with calmness he closed the door and advanced toward Don Alfonso, who was sitting in the easy-chair, with his legs crossed, and smoking a cigar with affected boldness, though he was extremely pale.

"I have come at last," said Miguel, looking straight into his eyes.

"I see you have," replied Don Alfonso, puffing out a cloud of smoke.

"You will understand that. . . ."

"You want to ask me to explain my conduct?"

"No; I do not care to qualify your conduct now. The only thing that interests me at present is to save my sister's honor. I come to demand that you marry her immediately or fight with me."

A short pause ensued. Don Alfonso replied coolly:—

"I will neither marry your sister, nor will I fight with you."

"We shall see," said Miguel, smiling sarcastically.

"There will be no question about it."

"We will speak about the second afterward. As to the first: When I heard of my sister's abduction, I suspected that you had not undertaken it for any decent motive. Still I could not persuade myself that you would carry out your treachery to the point of being willing to make a lady who is of your own blood your mistress."

Julia uttered a groan. Miguel looked at her with compassionate eyes, and said: —

"Forgive me, Julia; I had forgotten that you were here."

"In declining to marry your sister," replied Don Alfonso, "I am not influenced by anything that could be construed in the least to her discredit. I grant that she is an excellent girl. The only thing is, that it never entered into my calculations to marry either her or any one else. This decision, which I made long ago, neither you nor any one else can alter."

"Is this your ultimatum in regard to the first part of my question?"

"It is."

"Very good; now we come to the second. I suppose that you will not refuse to give me reparation by means of arms. . . ."

"I do refuse. I have injured you deeply; it would be a fine thing if I killed you besides. . . . And to allow you to kill me — frankly, I have just as little notion."

"There is one infallible means of making you fight: I will slap your face in public."

"I don't doubt that you would do so. I regard you as a man of courage; you would do it even though you

thereby signed your own death-warrant. Whatever weapons we should choose, you cannot be ignorant that I have ninety chances to ten of killing or wounding you. . . ."

Miguel made a scornful gesture.

"I know that this does not terrify you; but let us reason about it: What advantage would it give you to die? Would it wipe out your sister's dishonor? It would not only not wipe it out, but it would deprive her of the only support that she has in the world. Then let us suppose — and it is much to suppose — that you killed me. Your sole advantage would be in publishing the disgrace which now with a little caution can remain unknown."

Don Alfonso and Miguel both spoke in low tones, so as not to be heard from the outside; but the gestures and accent of each, and especially of the latter, were so energetic and excited, that they very well took the place of loud words. Julia sat on the sofa, motionless, and with her head bent low.

"Do you imagine that I am going to accept this logic with which you wish to avoid the unpleasantness of exposing your life? Have no such thought, even though there were one probability against a thousand of killing me, it would be a pleasure for me to face you with sword or pistol. How far the set resolution that I entertain of dying or of killing you goes to put us on an equality, you know perfectly well. Therefore drop these arguments worthy only of a coward, and be kind enough to expect to spend as painful hours as those which you have taken so much pains to make us suffer."

"I see that you mean to insult me. Do so with impunity; I grant you the privilege. . . . But I warn you not to let an ill-sounding word pass your lips in public."

"In private and in public I am resolved to do the same! You wretch!" exclaimed Miguel, beside himself.

"Everywhere I shall declare that you are a knave, a cowardly assassin, who fights duels only with those unable to defend themselves. In order that you may see how much fear I have of you, take this."

Saying these words, he leaped like a lion upon Saavedra, who had risen to his feet, expecting some such move. Before he could raise his hand, the Andalusian seized him by the arms and brutally hurled him back into the middle of the room, so that he reeled. Miguel was just on the point of springing at him again; but at that instant he found himself held by more gentle arms — those of his sister, who, with her face distorted, her eyes flashing, her voice choking with sobs, said: —

"No, Miguel, no; you cannot measure yourself with this man. After what I have just heard I should prefer a thousand times to die, or to spend my whole life in disgrace, rather than to marry such a monster."

"Let go of me! Let go!" cried Miguel, trying to free himself from her arms.

"No, my brother; kill me, put me into a convent, but don't expose your own life. . . . Remember Maximina and your little son."

Don Alfonso at the same time stretched out his hand, and said calmly: —

"Before beginning a disgusting scene, unworthy of two gentlemen, such as we are. . . ."

"Of a gentleman like this! you are no gentleman," exclaimed Julia, giving him a furious look and clinging to her brother.

"Before beginning a scene like this," the Andalusian went on to say, making a contemptuous gesture at the interruption, "listen to one word, Miguel. I have said that I am resolved not to fight, because *I do not wish* to run the risk of killing you, nor of dying. From here I am going

directly to Paris, and probably you will never see me again in this world. If you insist on detaining me, I will meet force with force; if you insult me, as I am in a strange country where no one knows me, it will be of no great consequence to me. And if you should happen to tell the story in Madrid, besides publishing your own dishonor, no one will believe you; because it is not credible that a man who has fought fourteen duels, five of them to the death, would through fear avoid a challenge from a man who scarcely knows how to hold a weapon. So then understand that my resolution is irrevocable."

"Well, then, I will kill you like a dog," said Miguel, whipping out a revolver from his pocket.

"If you kill me (which I shall take good care that you do not do)," retorted Saavedra, drawing another revolver, "you would go from here straight to jail, and your sister would remain forsaken."

Miguel stood for a moment in doubt; then he shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of sovereign contempt, and said, as he put back the pistol:—

"You are right. The truth is, that as a knave you are quite up to the standard! Come on, Julia, come! I am ashamed to spend any more time wasting words with this *vile wretch*."

And taking his sister around the waist, he drew her from the room.

Don Alfonso watched them as they disappeared: he listened until the sound of their steps was lost; he also shrugged his shoulders, put back his revolver, and, while he arranged his necktie before the glass, previous to going out, he muttered with a diabolical smile:—

"I did not come out of it quite as well as I expected, . . . but after all, this adventure has not been so bad!"

XXVII.

As soon as Miguel and his sister reached the capital, they learned of an event which grieved them intensely. Let us relate it from the beginning.

On account of the affectionate preference which Julia had shown on the evening of the party, our heroic friend Utrilla had recovered sufficient spirits to last at least half a year.

His sweet enemy made him drain the cup of triumph at one draught. Intoxicated with love and pride, it took two consecutive months of continual rebuffs, before this glorious young fellow came clearly to understand that her humor had changed a little. It is evident that such a change was not sufficient to affect him very seriously, since he was very certain, now more than ever, of the irresistible fascination which he exercised over the beauty. That closing of the window when he passed along the street, that turning of the eyes in the opposite direction, and not replying to his letters, were for the lad only "open strategies" by which the girl was trying to make him fall in love with her, and keep him more than ever her slave.

As a proof of this, let us say that once, happening to be at the theatre, he took a place opposite to where she was, and not taking his eyes from her through a whole *entr'acte*, a friend, touching him on the shoulder, said:—

"*Hold*, comrade! evidently that little brunette pleases you."

"That's an old story," replied the ex-cadet, dryly and with dignity.

"And the girl; how about her?"

"Poor girl!" he exclaimed, shaking his head, and smiling compassionately.

The friend observed, however, that during the whole evening the young girl did not once turn her eyes in that direction, though she often looked toward a lower proscenium box, where there were a number of young aristocrats.

Very far, therefore, from being discouraged, Utrilla was almost happy. He would have been entirely so if, instead of having to keep account of candles put out, he had been occupied in some more congenial business, and had had the good fortune to have killed, or at least dangerously wounded, some one in a duel. But up to the present time, unfortunately, no favorable opportunity had presented itself. Still, he was waiting anxiously for one, for, in truth, his conscience troubled him for being now eighteen years old, and "never having once been into the field."

Of late he had begun to take lessons in the use of the foils at a fencing-school, and in presence of the professor and his companions he had made allusion to some deadly project which he had conceived, and which, in our opinion could not have been anything else than the riddance of his rival Don Alfonso.

Months passed, and at regular hours, with a constancy worthy of a more fortunate result, Utrilla wore out the heels of his boots along the sidewalks of the Calle Mayor.

Occasionally Julita would deign to greet him with a wave of the hand, in answer to the energetic way in which her suitor took off his hat to her from the street. Still, the greater number of times it happened that when the brigadier's daughter caught sight of him looming around the corner, she would hastily close the balcony, and this our young man took as a sign of exquisite modesty and timidity at his penetrating glances. The most that he felt called upon to say in complaint was: —

"This Julita — when will she cease being a mere child!"

The unshaken faith which he had in the fascinating virtue of his smile and his genteel appearance was sufficient to sustain him in this illusion; but it must be confessed that some help was given toward it by the fact that Julita herself, though very mercifully, made use of him on occasion, to wake Saavedra's jealousy, when she was vexed with him. And sometimes at the theatre she would talk with him in the presence of the *caballero* himself.

This was the position of affairs when the bomb exploded; that is, when Julita eloped that evening with her cousin. The first news of this that Utrilla received was communicated to him by *la brigadiera's* door-maid, with whom he sustained cordial relations, strengthened from time to time by a chance peseta. As was to be expected, the ex-cadet resolutely refused to believe it. But when he found the evidence overwhelming, he stood like a statue — not a Greek one, however; his nostrils dropped, and his dull, myoptic eyes expressed absolutely nothing except imbecility: his Adam's apple stood out in a manner truly monstrous.

After the first shock was past, Utrilla considered what was befitting for him to do in this most extraordinary juncture. He thought of starting after the fugitives, overtaking them, and killing the seducer with one stab; but above and beyond the great difficulty of overtaking them, in what character should he present himself before them, being neither brother nor husband of the stolen damsel. This project having been rejected, it came to him clear as the day that the only thing left worthy of such a misfortune was suicide. After racking his brains for a whole day he found no other adequate solution.

Jacobo Utrilla, with that marvellous perspicacity with which he was endowed in these delicate matters pertain-

ing to honor, made up his mind that the world would never forgive him unless he put an end to his existence on this occasion. And as a man who valued his dignity above all things, he resolved to sacrifice on this altar his own life, so sweet to all created things.

Melancholy night that which preceded this tragic event! Utrilla was perfectly well aware of what he had to do in such a situation as this; without any trouble at all, he could have written a *Handbook of Suicide.* Thus he spent the time till dawn in writing letters and drinking black coffee.

One of them was to his father, asking his pardon, but, at the same time, making him to see by weighty reasons that if he had acted in any other way, he would have dishonored the noble name that he bore; another, to Julia, very dignified, very courteous, very generous; the only favor that he asked was that sometimes she should place a flower on his tomb; the last was, in fact, to the judge of the police, giving him to understand "that no one was to blame for his death," etc.

Having scrupulously fulfilled those lofty duties, he washed his face and hands, and dressed with all care, and asked for chocolate. Doña Adelaida, who always arose at peep of day, gave it to him, though she was not a little surprised to see him so early in the morning dressed in such elegant style.

"Jacobito, why have you dressed all in black? Are you going to a funeral?"

"Yes, señora. . . . To the funeral of a friend of yours," he replied with admirable self-control.

"Who is it?"

"You will know in good time."

While he took his chocolate, he was genial and jolly, as never before, making the good señora roar with his anec-

dotes. Utrilla was not naturally facetious, nor was he apt to be good-natured when he got up early; but he felt that, in these exceptional circumstances, it was very necessary to vary his habits; for he was a practical man, and had no rival as a connoisseur in such matters.

"Come, now, I am going from here to the Campo Santo," said he, putting on his hat and taking his cane.

"But is the service in the cemetery, Jacobito?"

"No; there is a mass in the chapel. . . . You would not like me to remain there, would you?"

"Where?"

"In the cemetery."

"*Ave Maria!* What jokes you do make, Jacobito!"

He gave a laugh that partook of an hysterical character. He took his gloves from his pocket; but before putting them on, he drew off a finger ring and handed it to the housekeeper, saying: —

"This ring you will please send to Don Miguel Rivera's house, and ask them to give it to him when he returns."

"Is it a present?"

"Yes; in return for the many favors that he has done for me."

Immediately this great-souled and punctilious young man sallied forth from the house with firm step, bent upon accomplishing his duty. Neither the beauty of the day, which was more than usually bright and glorious, nor the sight of the pleasures to which life invited him, nor the tender recollection of his father, caused him to pause in his serene and majestic march. As he passed near the Cibeles fountain, a hand-organ was playing a waltz-polka which reminded him of a certain experience that he had had in the saloon of Capellanes. He felt a little melancholy; but his heroic soul immediately recovered from this impulse of weakness.

He reached the Retiro: he was alone. He walked along with deliberate step in search of a hidden and mysterious spot. When he had found such, he sat down on a stone bench, took off his hat, and laid it carefully by his side; then he opened his frock coat and threw one leg over the other, taking care to pull down his trousers so as not to expose his stocking. Then thrusting one hand into his pocket and assuring himself that his letters were in their place, he drew out a small nickel-plated revolver.

At that moment a powerful temptation assailed the young lad's constant soul. It occurred to him that perhaps there was no reason for him to commit suicide; that it would be better to let things run their course; that the world had many revolutions to make, and he was too young to deprive himself of existence. If Julita had run away, that was her own affair: to kill himself was a serious, a very serious matter!

Still his bravery, which had never yet played him false, was able to conquer this horrible temptation. "No," he said to himself, "I cannot live honorably any longer. All those who were acquainted with these relations of mine would have the right to laugh at me. And Jacobo was not born that any one should laugh at him!"

He leaned back, placed his left elbow on the back of the bench, with his head poetically resting on his hand. With his right hand he aimed his revolver at his temple and fired.

Either because his hand trembled a little (a suspicion which would not amount to anything if it were not regarding this invincible youth of indomitable courage), or because the pistol did not shoot quite accurately, at all events Utrilla fell, badly wounded, but not killed. He was taken to the hospital,[1] and thence home. His condition was very serious.

[1] *Casa de socorro.*

When Miguel arrived from Lisbon three days after this tragic event, he immediately went to see him. He was deeply and painfully impressed. The bullet had cut the optic nerve, and the unhappy boy was hopelessly blind. The consultation of doctors had not given a favorable verdict. As the ball was still in the head, very near the brain, they judged that it was impossible for him to live very long. Any movement might bring with it instant death.

But the strange and terrible part of the affair was, that the hapless lad, already blind, lying in his bed suffering tremendous and unceasing anguish, did not want to die. With lamentable cries, which tore the heart and brought tears from all who were present, he begged his father and brothers to *make* him live — to live under any circumstances, even though he should be blind.

It was impossible. In the course of twelve days that intrepid and unfortunate young man had passed away. Miguel was with him till the very last.

XXVIII.

By the advice of all, it was determined that *la brigadiera* and her daughter should leave Madrid and go to live at the Astillero of Santander. It was the only place, as they already had a house rented, that offered them immediately a secret refuge where to hide their shame.

After they had taken their departure, Miguel remained more calm. Nevertheless, a deep sadness had taken possession of his heart, which neither his wife's love nor the infantile graces of his baby were sufficient to dissipate. And the reason was that, beyond the grief caused by his sister's disgrace, he lived tormented by the thought of his

impending ruin. He could not hide the fact that Eguiburu was crouching like a tiger, ready to leap upon him and tear him to pieces.

He saw Mendoza very rarely; he noticed that he avoided meeting him, and when this was unavoidable, their conversation was short and embarrassed on both sides.

One day he went home at nightfall, pale enough. Maximina, who, as always, came to meet him, with the baby in her arms, did not notice it because it was so dark. He kissed his child affectionately again and again, and then went into his study. His wife stood at the door, motionless, gazing sadly at him.

"A light," said he, in imperious tones.

Maximina ran to the dining-room, left the baby in Juana's hands, and she herself brought the lighted candles. Miguel paid no attention to her, and began to write. When after a few moments he lifted his head, he saw her leaning against the mantel-piece, looking at him, her eyes brimming with tears.

"Why are you here? What is the matter?"

The little wife slowly approached him, and laying one hand on his shoulder, said, with a melancholy attempt at a smile:—

"Have I done anything wrong, Miguel?"

"Why so?"

"Always when you come in you give me a kiss, but to-day you don't pay any attention at all to me! . . . You have kissed the baby more than . . ."

Miguel leaped to his feet and strained his wife to his heart.

"No, my Maximina; if I kissed the boy, it was solely because I came in thinking about him and anxious about his fate."

Then, without being able to speak another word, he threw himself into a chair and sobbed.

Maximina stood as though she had seen the house fall down before her eyes. When the first instant of amazement was past, she ran to him and kissed him.

"Miguel, Miguel, light of my life, what is the matter?"

"Misfortune hangs over us, Maximina," he replied, with his face in his hands. "I have stupidly ruined you — you and my son!"

"Don't cry, Miguel, don't cry!" exclaimed the little wife, pressing her lips to her husband's face. "I had nothing; how could you ruin me?"

When he had grown a little calmer he explained to her what had taken place. Eguiburu had summoned him for the following day, to recognize his endorsements; and he expected him immediately to enforce his legal claim.

"Do you remember that day when, after I had guaranteed the thirty thousand duros for the paper, so that it might go on, I asked your opinion? You did not dare to tell me that I had not done well, and you gave me an evasive answer. How wise you were!"

"No, Miguel, no; you are mistaken," she answered, trying to spare her husband the mortification of having acted with less sense than a woman. "What did I know about such things? If you did wrong, I should have done much worse. . . . But, after all, what has happened is not worth your being so troubled. We haven't any money left: well, and what of that? We will work for our living, as so many others do. I am used to it; I am not a señorita; I can live very economically, and not suffer any. You shall see how little I will spend! And our darling, when he gets old enough, will work too, and become a useful man — see if that isn't so! Perhaps if he knew that he would not be obliged to work, he would be dissi-

pated, like so many other rich young men. And above all, he, and I too, will care for nothing else than to have his papa happy, with or without money."

Oh, how sweet sounded those words in the troubled Miguel's ears!

"You are my good angel, Maximina!" he exclaimed, kissing her hands. "I don't know what magic your words have to sweeten my sorrows instantaneously, to soothe me and calm me as though I had taken an aromatic bath. . . . Where did you learn this lovely eloquence, my life," he added, seating her on his knee. "You need not tell me! It all comes from here!"

And he kissed her just above her heart.

The husband and wife conversed a long time, calm, cheerful, drinking in with mouth and eyes the divine nectar of conjugal love. Extraordinary thing! In spite of being on the eve of a great calamity, Miguel could not remember having spent a happier hour in his life. And though the events that took place within a few days sobered him, yet, thanks to this cheering balsam, they could not wholly dishearten him.

Eguiburu at last sprang down upon his prey. The legal claim was sustained. Miguel's two houses in the Calle del Arenal and on the Cuesta de Santa Domingo were sold by auction for forty-eight thousand duros. If the sale had not been forced, there is no doubt that he would have received much more for them. Purchasers naturally took advantage of the occasion.

The total amount of our hero's debt, with interest and expenses, reached fifty thousand duros. Consequently there remained a trifle to make up. Miguel sold a part of his furniture and some of his jewels so as to clear himself entirely. This having been done, he sought for a cheap tenement at the extreme outskirts of Madrid. He found

in the Chamberí a rather pretty third-story apartment in a house recently built, at the moderate rent of twelve duros a month. He immediately moved there, and settled down with some degree of comfort with the rest of his furniture. The house was small; but through Maximina's endeavors, it was soon converted into a quite pleasant residence. The largest room was reserved for Miguel, since, as they had no expectation of society calls, they had no need of a parlor.

Of the servants they kept only Juana, who offered to act as cook. The other girls, on learning that they were to be dismissed, began to weep passionately; Plácida above all was inconsolable.

"Señorita, for Heaven's sake, take me with you! With you I would go anywhere and eat potatoes, and not ask any pay."

Maximina was touched, and consoled her by saying that they were not going to leave Madrid, and that they could easily see each other.

The marvellous baby, whose rapid progress of late had reached the truly incredible point of raising his hands to heaven whenever he heard her sing the song —

Santa María, qué mala está mi tía!

was the object of many tender embraces on the part of the domestics, who between them squeezed him almost to death.

When they were fairly settled, Miguel naturally set himself about finding some occupation, so as to earn enough for living, though in a very modest manner. Politics were detestable to him; the same was true of journalism, although it was the only profession to which he was accustomed. He knew that there were going to be a few competitive offices vacant in the Council of State,

and he made up his mind that he would try for one of them. In his love for his wife and baby, and in his sense of duty which had never entirely abandoned him, and which, amid his misfortunes, now arose in full strength in his mind, he found the stimulus and power not only to devote himself zealously to studies that were distasteful to him, but also to conquer his pride.

A young man who had shone in Madrid society, who had been the editor-in-chief of a newspaper and within a hair's breath of being deputy, could not help feeling some mortification in passing through a public examination for a place worth only twelve or fourteen thousand reals. He devoted himself ardently to the study of administrative law with such zeal that he hardly went out of the house, except a little while in the evening to rest his brain.

The very little money that they had left he spent with exceeding care so that it might hold out until the time of the competition, which was to be held after the summer, toward October or November.

Maximina in this respect was a model. Not only did she spend nothing on her person, for she had clothes enough, but also in the household expenses she performed prodigies of skill to reduce them to the smallest terms. Miguel was grieved, and almost shed tears secretly when he saw her making soap herself because it would be a few centimos cheaper than at the shop, and many times taking charge of the kitchen while Juana was gone to a distant store where potatoes were a real cheaper, and ironing the nicer linen herself, etc.

But she seemed happy; perhaps happier than when they were in the midst of opulence. The luxuriance of their apartment on the Plaza de Santa Ana had a certain depressing influence upon her. As she never dusted or arranged the furniture herself, they seemed to her

hardly to be hers. Now everything was the opposite; she had put them in their places after serious perplexities; she dusted them every day, she swept and brushed the carpet, she polished with stag-horn powder all the metal arrangements, she kept the window in her husband's room carefully washed; in fact, she took entire charge of all the details of the household.

It was for Miguel a pleasure not free from melancholy to see her mornings, with a silk handkerchief wrapped around her head in the Biscaïan manner and in a woollen apron, gracefully waving the feather duster and lightly humming some sentimental *zórcico* of her country.

But Maximina understood to the last detail the economy that referred to herself. This from time to time caused Miguel deep pain. Without his knowing it she had given up her chocolate in the afternoon. When he discovered it he became furious.

"Who would ever have thought of it! The idea of cutting down your food when you are nursing a baby! It is senseless and almost a sin! I forbid you to do such a thing! do you hear me? Rather than let you deny yourself what you needed to eat, I would go and break stones in the street, or beg! You know that I would!"

"Don't scold me, Miguel, for Heaven's sake! It was because I did not care for chocolate these days."

"Then you ought to have taken something else."

"I did not want anything."

"Come, come, Maximina, quit such foolishness. . . . And don't let it happen again."

Though the little wife tried to keep her feet hidden in his presence, he found another time that her shoes were worn through.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Why don't you buy another pair of shoes?"

"I will some time."

"You must buy them this very day. Yours are badly worn."

"All right. I will send for them to-day." And she managed to attract his attention to something else.

After five or six days had passed, he found that she was wearing the same ones.

"What a girl you are!" he exclaimed, in vexation.

"Don't scold me, Miguel! don't scold me!" the little wife hastened to say, throwing her arms around him, and smiling in mortification. A harsh word from Miguel was for her the severest of misfortunes.

"How can I help scolding you if you do not obey me?"

"Forgive me!"

"I am going to take your measure, and this very day bring you a pair of shoes."

"Oh no!" she said hurriedly. "Don't trouble yourself; I will send right out for some."

The reason for this was that she was afraid that her husband might buy more expensive ones than she wanted.

Miguel, on his side, likewise practised some personal economies, though he did not go to such lengths. But Maximina could not endure this. When she saw him put on a *hongo* and a silk handkerchief around his neck, so as to save his silk hat and the good clothes that he had, she grew vexed.

"How you *do* look; I don't like you so, Miguel!"

"It's because I don't care to dress up. I am only going on an errand, and shall be right back."

If at the end of any given time she found the same money in his vest, she would say sadly: —

"You don't spend anything, Miguel. Don't you lunch at the café? Why don't you go to the theatre?"

"Because I am very busy now. I will go as soon as the examinations are over. Besides, we must be a little economical for the present."

"How bad it makes me feel not to have you spend as you used to do!" she exclaimed, giving him a hug. "You are making this sacrifice for my sake! If you were alone, you would live much better."

"Come, come, don't be absurd, Maximina. Without you I should live neither well nor ill. . . . I should die," he replied, laughing.

Although excited by the prospect of the examinations, and working for them perhaps harder than he ought, our hero was not unhappy. When there is peace and love by the fireside, family-life is the best sedative for mental sufferings. This on one side, and on the other the confidence which he had in his forces made living, up to a certain point, delightful.

There came a day, however, in which happiness and relative calmness disappeared at the announcement that the examinations for which he was working were indefinitely postponed, possibly till the next year.

All his plans fell to the ground. As he had not for some time thought of any other way of escape from his difficulties, he felt annihilated. He had strength enough, nevertheless, to hide it from his wife, and to appear at home serene and happy as usual. Redoubled by the surprise, the energies of his soul were awakened to new vigor.

"It is necessary, at all events, to seek for work," he said to himself. He had money enough to last only for a month. Still he allowed his wife to spend as before, certain that she could not economize more than she did at the time without undergoing serious privations. The first thought that occurred to him was to seek for employ-

ment with some private firm. He called on a number of friends, and all cheered him with good words.

Nevertheless a month passed, and no employment appeared. He found himself obliged to pawn his watch in order to pay his landlord and store account; he told his wife that he had left it to be regulated.

A second month passed, and still nothing turned up. One day Maximina, dead with mortification, said to him, as though she were confessing some crime: —

"Miguel, the shopkeeper down street has sent me his bill, and as I have not a cuarto, I can't pay it."

The brigadier's son trembled; but hiding it as well as he could, he replied, with affected indifference: —

"Very well; I will see that it is paid when I go out. How much is it?"

"Two hundred and twenty-four reals."

"Do you need any more money?"

Maximina dropped her eyes and blushed.

"I owe Juana her wages."

"I will bring it this afternoon."

He said these words without knowing what he said. Where was he to get it? His Uncle Bernardo had been sent some months before to a private mad-house in Paris. Doña Martina and her family had also gone there to look after him. Enrique was not in the condition to lend it to him. His step-mother was out of town, and she had barely enough to live decently; moreover, it caused him an invincible repugnance to ask back what he had once given. No one of the family was left of whom he could ask it, except his Uncle Manolo.

To him he went.

Uncle Manolo, a grave man and of excellent charity, although he knew about his nephew's ruin, had not realized that it was so complete. He stood with his mouth open

at hearing his request. He took out of his drawer the forty duros which he had requested and handed them to him. Miguel, through certain words that escaped him, perceived that he was undergoing a greater sacrifice than any one could have imagined. He suspected, or rather he felt, almost certain, that his uncle was subjected to a shameful servitude. *La intendenta* apparently had no thought of abandoning the care of her property, and she allowed him each month a certain sum of money for his private wants, which were, as always, large and perfectly indispensable.

Accordingly, Miguel went away greatly disturbed at the interview, and convinced that to borrow money of Uncle Manolo in such circumstances was equivalent to giving him a very great annoyance.

After this episode, convinced that he had no right to expect aid from his relatives, he put forth double zeal in his search for work of any kind. But all his attempts met with the bad luck which pitilessly followed him. In some places there was no vacancy; in others, finding that he was a señorito, and had never been in any counting-house, they distrusted him.

At the editorial offices he was most kindly received; but, as at that time, and even now, the pecuniary affairs of the press were rather upset, willing as the directors would have been, they did not find it easy to give him a position. The most that any of them promised was to give him a place as soon as there was a vacancy. But what he needed now, at this very moment, was some money to buy food, and the days were passing, and it did not come. Without Maximina knowing about it, he pawned a set of gold studs and a ring which had belonged to his father.

Finally the owner of an afternoon paper gave his abso-

lute promise that he should have forty duros a month, as soon as a month was past: during the actual month, on account of certain difficulties in the business office, he could not pay it down. Our hero worked a whole month for nothing. At the beginning of the next, as it was absolutely necessary for him to pay certain sums, Miguel asked him to let him have some money.

Then the owner and manager, adopting that air half complaining and half diplomatic, which all assume who are about to refuse a just but unwelcome claim, painted in the darkest colors the business situation of the daily, the difficulty of collecting certain sums that were due him, the necessity which all editors have of "putting their shoulders to the wheel in order to sustain a young enterprise," etc., etc.

"Friend Huerta," replied Miguel, very much dissatisfied, "hunger has made me altogether too weak to be able to put my shoulder to any new enterprise; on the contrary, *I* need to be propped up myself so as not to fall."

It was impossible to get a penny from him. Our hero took his leave, full of indignation, the more because he happened to know that all the money taken in went straight into the director's private box, and that he used it to lead the life of a prince.

Now began for the young pair a gloomy and trying time. Miguel was unable any longer to hide his necessities. One by one the few objects of value which they had in the house went to the pawn-shop, where they brought scarcely the fifth part of their value. Oftentimes the young man despaired and cursed his lot, and even spoke of going and firing a shot at the Count de Ríos and another at Mendoza.

Maximina, in these painful crises, consoled him, cheered him with new hope, and when this resource failed, she

succeeded in softening him with her tears and driving away from him all his evil thoughts. Always serene and cheerful, she made heroic attempts to divert him, calling to her aid the little one, when worst came to worst; she carefully concealed the toil which in his absence she undertook so as not to let him see that there was anything at fault when he came.

Poverty, nevertheless, was pressing closer and closer around them each day. At last the day came that actually they had not a peseta in the house and knew not where to get another. At the grocery store they were not willing to let them have goods on credit.

Miguel, without his wife's knowledge, took one of his coats, wrapped it up in paper and carried it to a pawnshop: they would give only two duros for it. On his return, as he was meditating how to escape from this miserable situation, and seeing no way of finding work, he suddenly adopted a violent resolution: namely, that of undertaking manual labor. With his face darkened by an expression of pain he said to himself as he walked along: —

"Rather than my wife starve to death I am ready to do anything. . . . Anything! even to commit robbery. I am going to try the last resort."

Near his house was a printing-office where on days of depression, when he had just received some rebuff, he often spent long hours watching the compositors at their work or trying himself to spell out some easy task. The proprietor was an excellent man, and very cordial relations had sprung up between them. He went in there and calling him aside, he said: —

"Don Manuel, I find myself without means of getting food; in spite of all my efforts during these last months I have not been able to obtain a situation. Would you

be willing to take me as an apprentice in your office, giving me a little something on account of future work?"

The printer looked at him with an expression of sadness.

"Are you so bad off as all that, Don Miguel?"

"In the last depths of poverty."

The owner of the printing-office considered a few moments, and said:—

"Before you could learn how to set type with any degree of rapidity, a long time would pass. Besides, it is not right that a *caballero* should soil his hands with ink. The only thing that you can do here is to help the proof-reader. Do you object?"

"I am ready to do whatever you order."

He spent that day, in fact, reading proofs. At night the proprietor told him that he would give him three pesetas a day salary until he dismissed the present proof-reader, who was a great drunkard. As he started to leave, he thrust into his hand a ten-duro bill as advance pay.

"Thanks, Don Manuel," he said, deeply touched. "In you, who are a workingman, I have found more generosity than in all the *caballeros* whom I have been to see up to the present time."

For several days he worked as well as he could, conscientiously fulfilling his task. It was hard and monotonous to the last degree; it kept him busy from early in the morning till night. Moreover, the very insignificant pay scarcely sufficed to buy potatoes; and although the proprietor was anxious to send away the proof-reader and give him the place, Miguel opposed it because he also was the father of a family, and had no other means of livelihood.

XXIX.

While they were in this destitute and most melancholy situation, it came to pass one afternoon just as he had come in from the printing-office that the bell rang. Juana announced that a very old *caballero* wanted to speak with him. He sent word for him to come in, and instantly there appeared in his study the old apothecary Hojeda.

"Don Facundo!" he cried, with genuine joy.

"It is I, Miguelito; it is I. I am perfectly furious! Can't you see it by my face? I must give you a regular scolding. Who would have thought that you, degenerate scion, should be tramping through this blessed world of ours, hunting for a situation, and never have remembered an old friend like me! I know very well that I am a poor old man who is not good for anything."

"That is not so, Don Facundo; that is not so. . . . It is because our professions are so unlike. . . . Besides, I was afraid that mamma would find out. . . ."

He could not give an excuse. The truth was that he had forgotten the saintly old man.

"No use, my dear fellow, no use; you were ungrateful. . . . You forget those who love you, and go and ask favors of men who did not even know your father."

"You are right. . . ."

"Well, then, I have scolded you sufficiently. Let us come to what interests us more closely at present. I have come to offer you a place in the bank of Andalucía. For more than a month I have been begging it for you. At last, this very day, they put it at my disposition. Salary, sixty duros a month. Will you take it?"

Miguel's only answer was to squeeze his hand violently. After a moment he exclaimed, with his eyes full of tears: —

"If you only knew, Don Facundo, how opportunely this comes!"

"Haven't you any money?"

"Not a peseta!"

"Haven't you found anything to do?"

"Yes; that of assistant proof-reader in the printing-office just below here."

"How much salary?"

"Three pesetas a day."

"Jesus! Jesus!" exclaimed the apothecary, raising his hands to his head and remaining in a thoughtful attitude. He had the delicacy not to ask him a question about his ruin. Nevertheless, Miguel of his own accord told him all, even to the smallest particulars. When Don Facundo had heard the whole story, he said: —

"See here, Miguel, I am going to ask a favor of you."

"You shall!"

"I want you to accept these six thousand reals[1];" and he laid the bills on the table. "I am an old bachelor: the money that I have is amply sufficient."

"Don Facundo, I cannot. . . ."

"I demand it in the name of the friendship that bound me to your father."

There was no way of declining it.

"Besides, you must give me your word that if the sixty duros a month are not sufficient for your living expenses, and you find yourself in a tight place, you will come to me first of all. . . . I will not leave the house unless you promise me."

The brigadier's son gave the promise. Then he called in Maximina, and the three talked a long time about vari-

[1] $300.00.

ous matters. Don Facundo seemed to lose his wits over the baby. When it came the time for him to take his departure, Miguel seized him by the hand, and said with emotion : —

" Don Facundo, I give up trying to tell you what is passing through my heart at this moment. I will simply repeat what I said once before : *You are a great personage.*"

" Miguelito, if you persist in saying these foolish things, I will never come to your house again."

" Then what name do you want us to give those who come only when there is some misfortune to alleviate?"

With this opportune visit, thanks to God, the anxiety of our young friends ended. The sixty duros, carefully husbanded, were sufficient for them to live comfortably. Nevertheless, Miguel did not care to relinquish the idea of the place in the Council of State, and when the examinations were given, he secured one with a salary of sixteen thousand reals ; thereupon he resigned his place in the bank, which gave him too much work. With this salary and three or four thousand reals more that he earned by writing articles from time to time for the papers and reviews, he felt himself perfectly happy.

And he was in reality happy. Poverty had more than ever strengthened the cords of love. The cruel rebuffs that society had made him feel caused him to realize that his home was the only place where true happiness was to be found, — a corner of heaven where Maximina played the rôle of angel.

His love to her did not increase, for that was impossible ; but his admiration did. This young wife's lofty spirit had never showed itself so admirable, so worthy of being adored, as during the critical and painful days through which they had just been passing. So great had come to be the love and admiration felt by our hero, that

when he found in his study any object that Maximina had left there, he would kiss it tenderly and respectfully, as though it had been a sacred relic.

During the hours that he was free from his duties, he studied passionately. He rarely went from the house. When he did so, it was generally to read in the "Ateneo" the books which he was unable to buy.

"You read here a great deal, friend Rivera," some friend would say, laying his hand on his shoulder.

"It is because I haven't any money," he would reply, with a laugh.

When he returned home at half-past ten or eleven in the evening, his wife would be just about going to bed. That was the happiest time for Maximina. Since the birth of the baby they occupied separate apartments; she slept in a room with two beds, with Juana; he alone, in another chamber. Miguel enjoyed carrying to her room a little lunch, either brought in from outside or something already in the house; for as Maximina was still nursing the baby, who was now fifteen months old, she felt very weary at this time of the day. How great the poor girl's pleasure was to see her husband coming in punctually with a slice of ham or some dainty bit of sweetmeat! If he went to the extravagance of bringing her something expensive, she would say: —

"That must last three days."

And in spite of all his protests, she would insist upon it being divided into three parts.

Miguel watched her eating with a peculiar feeling of rapture; he would offer her a glass of wine, cut the bread for her, and carry away all the dishes. And then in a whisper, so as not to wake the baby, who was sleeping in his crib, they would talk sometimes for an hour and more.

Meanwhile Juana, still dressed, would be sound asleep in a room near the kitchen. Miguel, as he went to his chamber, would waken her (not a very easy task); and she, staggering with sleep, would go to her mistress's room for the rest of the night.

The young man, aged fifteen months, gave them, without being conscious of it, more enjoyment than all the tenors of the opera and the *zarzuela* combined. He was constantly travelling, if we can allow that term to be applied to his going like a drunken man "making *s*'s, from the arms of his father to those of his mother. The tyranny which he exercised in that house was something scandalous. Above all, toward Maximina he behaved in a manner exceedingly boorish, without there being the least reason for him to be offended with her. For though it was very clear that she was the one who from her own vitality furnished him nutriment, not only did he not show her the lofty consideration which she deserved, but he evidently had a preference for Juana, and this was caused by nothing else than the fact that the Guipuzcoana maid made him laugh more with her caresses and dandling of him.

Poor Maximina could not bring herself to believe in this cruel preference. One day after breakfast, as the three were playing with the baby in the corridor, Juana wanted to give proof of it.

"Come, now, go to your mamma," she said to the little one.

But he clung with all his might to her.

"It is evident that he loves you only when he is hungry," said Miguel, making fun of her.

Maximina became grieved and even vexed, and tried to take the child from Juana, but he objected and squealed.

"Come now, see if he won't come to me," suggested Miguel.

"Why not?" As soon as his papa spread open his arms, the capricious infant sprang into them.

"Do you see?" he exclaimed, leaping up in triumph.

Then Maximina, full of sorrow and mortification, the more because her husband and Juana laughed so heartily at her defeat, was going to pull him away by main force. Miguel started to run. Maximina, growing more and more nervous and incensed, trying not to cry, ran after him. At last, unable to overtake him, she went into the study. There Miguel shortly after found her standing up, leaning against the mantel-piece, her eyes hidden with one hand, and evidently crying. He went up to her on tiptoe, laid the baby on the rug, and said to him: —

"There now, go and ask forgiveness of your mamma, and tell her what you have just whispered in my ear: that you love her better than any one else in the world."

At the same time he put the child's mouth to his wife's hand, as it hung by her side.

When she felt her son's fresh, moist lips touching her, the little woman turned her head to look at him: through the tears gleamed in her eyes a smile of love and forgiveness, which it was a shame that that ungrateful little miscreant could not have appreciated.

One night, after dinner, Miguel felt lazy, as was often the case, and did not care to go out. They went to the study, and Maximina began to read the paper. Afterward, when she had taken her seat on her husband's knee, they began to talk, as usual, telling each other about the little events of the day.

"Do you know?" she said, "this afternoon I had a caller!"

"Who was it?"

"A villain!" said the little wife, smiling mischievously.

Miguel could not refrain from a slight frown. He was very jealous, as all men must be who really love, though he tried carefully to hide it.

"Who was the villain?"

The somewhat harsh tone of this question did not escape Maximina.

"The curé of Chamberí."

"The little old man who said mass on the ninth?"

"The very same. . . . Why didn't you like it that the villain was here? eh, you rogue!" she added, giving him a tender hug.

"And what brought the curé?" asked Miguel, in his turn parrying his wife's question.

"To put us down in his book. . . . I could not help laughing a little. . . . I opened the door for him, and he said to me: '*Holá*, child! go and tell your mamma the rector of Chamberí is here.'—'I haven't any mamma,' said I.—'Then tell the lady of the house.'—'I am she,' I told him, half dead with mortification. He began to cross himself, saying, '*Ave Maria! Ave Maria!* what a little, young thing!' He was still more surprised to know that we had been married two years and three months."

"That's natural enough,—with that smooth, round, baby cheek of yours, you would deceive any one."

"It is absurd; I am not a child any longer: I shall be eighteen next month."

Before going to bed, they put out the lights and opened the balcony window to enjoy for a little while the spectacle of the starry sky.

It was a clear, mild night toward the last of April. As they were on the third floor, and the section of the city where they lived was less built up, they could see more than half of the heavenly vault. As they stood together,

Maximina leaning her arm on her husband's shoulder, they silently contemplated for a long time that sight which will forever be the most sublime of all.

"How large and beautiful that star is, Miguel. What a pure, bright light it gives!" said Maximina, pointing to the sky.

"That is Sirius. In the books of antiquity it is said that it used to shine with a red light. However, it is not any greater or more beautiful than the others, except that it is not so far away: it is one of three nearest to us."

"Though Sister San Onofre kept telling us that the earth was a star like those, only still smaller, I can never seem to believe it."

"And so small, Maximina! Each one of the stars that you see is thousands and millions of times bigger than our earth. Our solar system, of which we are the poorest and most insignificant part, belongs to that great nebula that crosses the sky like a white band. Each particle of that dust is a sun around which revolve other worlds, which, like ours, have no light of their own. In order that you may get some idea of its size, let me tell you it is isolated in the heavens like an island and is shaped like a lens; well, then, for a ray of light to travel from one extreme of the longer axis of this lens to the other it takes seventeen thousand years, and yet light travels at the rate of seventy thousand leagues a second!"

"*Madre mia!* how tremendous!"

"But that is a mere nothing. Our nebula is only one of many others that people space. There are others vastly larger. With the telescope they are constantly discovering new ones. When a telescope of greater power is invented, then the nebulæ are separated into stars; but beyond these are other nebulæ still, which had never been seen before. If a telescope of still greater power were

made, those nebulæ, also, in their turn, would be reduced to stars; but then, beyond that, there would be still other nebulæ, and so on forever."

"And so there is no end to the sky?"

"That is the supposition."

Maximina remained for a few minutes rapt in thought.

"And are there inhabitants in those other worlds, Miguel?"

"There is no reason why there should not be. Such observations as we can make in our own solar system make it probable that the other stars have conditions of life very like our own. . . . Do you see that big beautiful star which looks like Sirius? That is Jupiter, one of our brother worlds; but an older brother — fourteen hundred times as big as we are. He is a privileged brother, the first-born, so to speak, of the system. There the day lasts five hours, and the night five; but as he has four moons which are constantly shining, and long twilights, it may be said that nights do not exist there. The same may almost be said of the seasons. Eternal spring reigns over its whole surface. For us that is the symbol or the ideal of a happy existence. Why should there not be inhabitants in that fortunate world?"

The young wife was again silent and thoughtful, and at last she asked: —

"How do those worlds hang in space, and travel forever, and never run into each other?"

"They are sustained, and they live through love. . . . Yes, through love," he repeated, seeing the curiosity in his wife's eyes. "Love is the law that rules the whole creation: the sublime law that unites thy heart to mine is the same that unites all the beings of the universe, and yet keeps them distinct. We are one in God, in the Creator of all things, but we still enjoy the beautiful

privilege of individuality. This great privilege, however, is at the same time our great imperfection, Maximina. Through it we are separated from God. To live eternally united to Him, to sleep in His bosom as the child in its mother's lap, is the constant aspiration of humanity. The man who most keenly and imperiously feels this necessity is the best and most righteous. What is the meaning of self-abnegation and sacrifice? Can it be anything else than the expression of that secret voice which has its seat in our hearts, and tells us that to love one's self is to love the finite, the imperfect, the ephemeral, and to love others is to be united by anticipation with the Eternal. Alas for the man who does not listen to the call of this voice! Alas for him who shuts his ears to the breathings of his soul, and runs in hot haste after transitory things! Such a man will always be a miserable slave of time and necessity. . . ."

Miguel grew eloquent as he went on speaking. Maximina listened to him with ecstatic eyes. She did not absolutely comprehend his words, but she saw clearly that all that proceeded from her husband's lips was noble and lofty and religious, and that was sufficient for her to be in accord with him.

He still went on speaking. At last he suddenly stopped. Both stood in silence, gazing into the immensity of the heavens. A solemn and pure emotion had come over them. In rapt contemplation they listened to the mysterious harmonies of their souls, which, without the aid of speech, by a kind of magnetic power, vibrated from one heart to the other. After a while Maximina said in a whisper: —

"Miguel, would you not like to repeat a Pater Noster?"

"Yes," he replied, tenderly pressing her hand.

The young wife said the Pater Noster with true fervor. Her husband repeated it with equal earnestness.

Never in his life, either before or after, did our hero feel himself nearer God than at that moment.

The night was advancing. The clock in the study struck its twelve silvery notes. They shut the window, and lighted the lamps to retire.

* * * * *

XXX.

In the morning Maximina, after taking chocolate, felt a trifle indisposed. They attributed it to a little indigestion, and took no account of it. All that day she dragged about, feeling wretchedly, but still keeping up. When Miguel came from his office, she had thrown herself on the bed; on hearing the bell she quickly got up, and came out as usual to receive him. Nevertheless, she soon felt obliged to lie down again; she kept getting up to attend to this thing and that, but returned to a lying posture again, now on Miguel's bed, now on her own.

"I am going to call a doctor," said he. Maximina was strongly opposed. The only compromise that he could make was that she would allow him to call one on the next day if she were not better. She absolutely expected to wake up the next day sound and well.

But it was not so.

She awoke with a quick pulse, and Miguel would not hear to her sitting up. He called in an old and experienced doctor that there was in the ward, and he, after taking her pulse and looking at her tongue, declared that she had some fever, but that apparently there was no disorder of the stomach. Miguel, on hearing this, wished to stay away from the office, but his wife was so opposed to it that finally he gave in to her, promising to come home early.

In the afternoon her temperature had risen slightly; still she was calm: only from time to time, as though she felt some oppression, she would draw long, deep sighs.

The next morning the doctor found her decidedly feverish, but he could not as yet decide what was the cause, for the frequent and deep inspirations which he obliged her to take were perfect, and there seemed to be no lung difficulty, and the stomach also was in sound condition. He inclined to think that it was rheumatic fever, for, a few days before, she remembered that she had complained of pains in her shoulder; more than that he could not assure them.

Miguel went to his office, but he returned at two o'clock; the doctor left his clinical thermometer, so that her temperature might be taken from time to time and recorded on a piece of paper.

On the next day the temperature was still higher. The doctor now inclined to the opinion that the fever was nervous, because rheumatic symptoms were not well defined. He prescribed the valerianate of quinine and a potion. Miguel went to the office to report to his chief — nothing more. He stopped, however, to speak with his comrades; among them was one who had studied medicine, although without great success.

"What is the matter with your señora?" they asked him.

"I do not know. The doctor is doubtful whether it is a rheumatic or a nervous fever."

"Man alive! I don't see what one fever has to do with the other," said the medical employé, with self-sufficiency. "At all events pray God, Rivera, that it may not be nervous fever."

Miguel, on hearing these words, felt chilled through. A strange trembling passed over his frame. He made an

effort to control himself, and said in a voice that was already changed: —

"The doctor told me to take her temperature often."

"And how does her temperature stand?"

Although he did not know what exact connection the degrees had with the fever, yet, terrified by the words that had passed, he did not dare to say that she had forty-one and a few decimals, and replied: —

"Forty centigrade."

"That cannot be; that would be a very high fever. . . . Come, friend Rivera, it must be confessed that you know more about philosophy than about taking temperatures."

"Yes, Rivera; you must be mistaken," said another.

He stood rooted to the floor; he grew terribly pale, and was on the point of fainting away.

His companions, noticing his pallor, began to encourage him.

"Man! don't be frightened. . . . You must have made some mistake. Besides, even if you hadn't, it would not be necessarily fatal."

A companion, to give him still more encouragement, whispered: "Don't mind that pestilent fellow! What does he know about fevers? He never in his life opened a book!"

Nevertheless, he felt a stab in his very heart. He left the Consejos with his face changed, and took a carriage, for he feared that he might faint. He rushed into his wife's room.

"How do you feel?"

"Well," she replied, with a sweet smile.

"Let me take your temperature," said he, hastening to put the thermometer under her arm. His heart beat furiously. Not being able to stay still while the thermometer remained there, he began to walk up and down

through the room. At last with trembling hand he took it out, and ran to the shutter, which was closed; he opened it a little way and looked. The temperature had risen a few decimals: it was almost forty-two degrees.

He could not speak a word.

"What makes you so excited about that blessed little tube?" said Maximina. "What is the good of it?"

"I don't know; the doctor sent it to me. . . . I am going to set down the temperature."

Instead of going to his study, however, he went to his chamber, threw himself face down upon his bed, sobbing.

"They have killed me! They have killed me!" he murmured, while his tears bathed the pillows.

For nearly half an hour he thus lay without ceasing to repeat amid sobs the words: "They have killed me! They have killed me!"

In fact, a stab through the heart would not have had more effect upon him than the frightful idea that had been suggested to him at the office.

At last he arose, bathed his eyes in cold water, and again repairing to his wife's room told her that he was going to notify Don Facundo; for he would not forgive him for not doing so.

As he was going out, the neighbor who lived in the opposite apartment called at the door, to offer her services "for everything, absolutely for everything."

She was an excellent lady, a colonel's widow, whose son was a lieutenant and gave her much sorrow. Although she had only spoken a few words with Maximina on the stairway, it seemed that she was much drawn toward her. Miguel was very grateful to her, and took her into the bedroom, and then immediately set out on his errand.

He felt that he must confide in some one, and therefore he went in search of Don Facundo. As soon as he saw

him, he began to weep like a child. The poor señor endeavored to console him as well as he was able.

"You are very impressionable, Miguelito. Who would ever have thought of getting into such a state when the doctor has not said as yet that there was any danger! But, at all events, as you are so much alarmed, it would be a good idea to have a consultation of doctors, even if it were for nothing else than to calm you."

"Yes, yes, Don Facundo; I want to have a consultation!" exclaimed the anxious young man, as though salvation entirely depended on it.

"Very well, I will notify the doctors; you speak with the regular attendant, so that he will not be offended."

Miguel left the apothecary shop, much calmer. When he reached home, Maximina was a little delirious.

"She imagines," said the colonel's widow, "that there is a door open behind the head of the bed, and much cold comes in."

"How do you feel?" asked Miguel, laying his hand on her forehead.

"Well; but a great deal of cold air comes in from that open door."

"You are right; I will go and shut it."

He pretended to do so, and for a time she was pacified. The young man afterward wanted to kiss her; but she would not allow him, saying in great agitation, though in a low voice: —

"How can you be so shameless? Don't you see that this señora is here?"

Not even though she was delirious did the sentiment of bashfulness desert this young creature.

During the afternoon she was very restless, sometimes out of her head.

After her whim about the door she imagined that a number of men had come to get her. When Miguel approached the bed, she would say, in terror: —

"See! see that man who has come to take me away!"

"Never mind, *preciosa;* as long as I am here, no one will take you away!"

Her husband's voice and caresses brought her back to reason as by magic, and soothed her for a few moments.

The widow insisted on staying to watch that night, for it was two nights since either Juana or Miguel had gotten any sleep. The latter went and threw himself down on his bed, charging that if there were the least change, he should be called.

And in fact the widow woke him up about midnight, saying that Maximina refused to take her potion and was very restless.

He immediately arose and ran to her room. His wife, after the struggle that she had undergone with the worthy señora, was in a very agitated state, her face extremely flushed and her eyes wildly rolling. She did not know her husband. He, seeing her in that state, lost all his courage and began to weep. Then Maximina looked straight at him; her eyes soon lost that terrible look of delirium, and she sat up in bed, and leaning over toward the young man asked him: —

"Why are you weeping, light of my life? why are you weeping?"

"Because you have refused to take your medicine, and if you don't, you won't get well."

"I will take it, I will take it; don't cry, for Heaven's sake! Give it to me!"

And she eagerly drank the spoonful that he put to her lips.

"You will not weep any more, will you?" she asked him, anxiously, and on hearing him say "no," she kissed his hand again and again.

In the morning the consultation of physicians was held. One at a time they went in to see the sick woman.

"How tired I am of showing my tongue!" she exclaimed, with a comic gesture which made him laugh in spite of his tribulations.

The doctors could not come to a definite decision as to the seat of the fever; they all were inclined, however, to the opinion that it was in the nervous centre. They were perfectly agreed that at all hazards the temperature must be in some way reduced. For this they prescribed an antipyretic remedy.

Miguel himself went in search of it. Its effect was very quick. Within a few hours after taking it the fever had subsided two degrees; in the morning the thermometer indicated only thirty-nine and a few decimals; her restlessness and delirium had entirely disappeared. She felt so much better that Miguel had no doubt that in four or five days she would be up and about.

He was so excited by his excess of joy, that, being unable to stay in the house, he went out to enjoy the coolness of the morning, although he had been watching the night before. He took a turn through the Retiro; the weather was cool and beautiful; the joy that filled his soul to overflowing made him see in the bright sun, in the songs of the birds, in the foliage of the trees, mysterious beauties which he had never before realized. It was as much as he could do not to throw his arms around the solitary pedestrians whom he met.

But alas! he did not know that the remedy that the doctors had prescribed fulfilled its work merely in cooling the blood, and had not the power of overcoming the mal-

ady. Toward the end of the afternoon her temperature began to rise again. So deceived was he that he attributed it to the natural increase that all diseases tend to show at that time of day, and did not regard it with apprehension.

The doctor likewise said nothing that was calculated to alarm him. At eleven o'clock he went to bed, leaving Juana to watch.

Her voice aroused him from the deep sleep in which he was plunged.

"Señorito! señorito! the señorita is worse."

The voice with which a man condemned to death is wakened never sounded more terrible than this summons did to Miguel. He was on his feet in a flash; he ran to her room. Maximina had her eyes shut. When he came in, she opened them, tried to smile, and closed them again — never to open them more!

It was four o'clock in the morning. Juana ran to summon the doctor, first stopping at the opposite apartment. The colonel's widow insisted that it was only a fainting fit; she and Miguel put on a mustard poultice. The priest was sent for. In a few moments he arrived, at the same time with the doctor.

What was the use?

Miguel walked ceaselessly up and down the corridor, pale as a ghost. Soon he paused and wanted to enter his wife's room. The widow, the curé, and the doctor, tried to keep him back.

"No; don't go in, Rivera!"

"I know all; let me pass!"

By his face and manner they knew that it was useless to oppose him.

He threw himself on his wife's form, from which as yet not all the warmth and life had departed, and kissed her wildly for several minutes.

"Enough! enough! you are only killing yourself," they said to him.

Finally they drew him away.

"Better than thou," he cried, as he gave her one last kiss, "there never has been; there never will be on earth."

"Happy are they, my son, who, on dying, can hear such words," murmured the aged priest.

They led him away. He went straight to his study, and leaned against the window. The day had not as yet completely dawned. The suddenness of the shock had checked his tears. Motionless, with gleaming eyes, and leaning his brow against the pane, he stood a long time listening to that voice of revelation in his soul which alone has a right to speak at this supreme hour. At last he could hear himself murmur in a hoarse voice: —

"Who knows? who knows?"

XXXI.

What more do you wish to know?

Miguel staggered like an athlete who receives a blow in the midst of his forehead; but he did not succumb. In the unavoidable obligation upon him of protecting his baby boy, who had lost his mother just as he was beginning to stammer her name, he found strength to live.

His story, far from romantic, becomes even less interesting from this time forward. It is reduced almost entirely to meditations, doubts, hopes, discouragements, — storms such as only rage in the secret depths of the spirit. The story of it can be interesting only to the psychologist. Therefore we will condense this long and wearisome narration.

He devoted his whole life to his son. Work and study,

if they did not assuage his grief, sometimes made him forget it, lifting him at the same time to a loftier plane; as years went on, he maintained a deep and serious sadness which left him calm enough for thought. Day nor night did he leave his son. As often as he could, he took him with him to his office; he used to set him down opposite him, so that when he looked up, his eyes might fall upon that little face, in which he sought anxiously to discover lines and features of another that was graven as with a chisel on his very heart. If his friends wanted to make him happy for a moment, they had only to assure him that the little one would in time come to look exactly like his mother. On the other hand, if any one told him that he was going to resemble him, he would stand sad and thoughtful for a long time.

Sometimes, catching from his lips or in his eyes some expression peculiar to Maximina, he would burst out sobbing.

The little innocent creature would then look at him in surprise and dismay, until his father would gather him up into his arms, and kissing him again and again, would say: —

"Blessed child, you know not what you have lost!"

Likewise, many days he would take him to the cemetery and make him kiss after him the stone under which his mother was lying. Oh! if those kisses did not make their way through the marble, and cause the dust of the little maiden of Pasajes to tremble, you may be certain that nothing in this world could ever stir it.

Nor was it only in his boy that he saw his wife's living image. Any great spectacle, any heroic action, any touch of kindness, any work of art, above all, music, brought her suddenly to his imagination, and made the tears spring to his eyes; as though that dear woman, even if

she no longer existed, were still united to all that is noble, beautiful, and lofty in this earth. Consequently, he tried to stimulate these emotions as frequently as he could. He cultivated and kindled the religious sentiment, which had often seemed fainting, though never had it died out in his soul; he loved the arts; he clung to the friendship of the good.

As time went on, that same Mendoza, with whom he had not exchanged a word since he had been ruined and gone to live at Chamberí, became minister.

This will certainly surprise no one. Certain premises being granted, the results are sure to follow. As soon as he became minister, he sent Miguel a message, whether through generosity or egotism, we cannot say, asking him to be his private secretary, and at the same time retain his place in the Council of State.

The weak flesh felt like revolting at such a proposition. However, he was able finally to bring it into subjection. Long since, by force of prayer and meditation, he had emancipated himself from the dominion of pride. By means of terrible struggles, his soul had succeeded in breaking the chains that bound him to earthly objects. He had learned and would never forget the sublime truth which will eternally rise above human science, and will be the compendium of all truths, — SELF-NEGATION.

As soon as he set foot on this sacred ground of liberty, his life began to glide away in perfect serenity, in sweet and tranquil repose. In the sea of human passions, in the whirlwind of his own emotions, he had at last the good fortune *to find himself*, and understand what he was. His only thought thenceforward was to advance further and further along the road of liberty, until the hour of supreme emancipation should come for him. The only

and most ardent desire of his life was to be able *to love death*. Consequently, he employed the healthy and divine power of his imagination in creating another world, new and free, where he lived with his wife in the same sweet communion as of yore, sharing with her his love and his sorrows. When he completed any action of his life, he never failed to ask himself: —

"Would Maximina approve of it?"

Every day he confessed to her and told her the inmost secrets of his soul. And when he had the misfortune to fall into sin, profound grief would take possession of him, and he would think how, on that day, he had departed a little from his wife. In this way, sharing like a divine being in the august privilege of God, he succeeded in attaining a new life, or rather a foretaste of eternal life.

But, as a human being, his soul was many times shaken by the storm of doubt. He suffered the cruel assaults of temptation, and, like the Son of God in the Garden of Gethsemane, endured hours of agony which left deep scars upon his soul and diminished, if they did not entirely destroy, his strength. Let us witness one of them.

After he came out of the Ministerio, or from Congress, Mendoza was in the habit of riding in an open carriage through the Retiro. Miguel accompanied him. After whirling for a while among the throng of carriages the minister would begin to feel drowsy and would drop off to sleep, lulled by the gentle motion of the carriage. Miguel, almost always neglectful of the curious and gay sights of the promenade, would meditate, with his eyes fixed on the sky or on the landscape.

It was a mild afternoon, the mildest and most brilliant that spring had as yet bestowed that year on the citizens of Madrid.

The sun was setting. Through the open window our young secretary saw it descending between the trees over the wide plains of Vallecas, descending majestically till it reached the edge of a cloud, and casting a golden trail over the earth.

Carried away by the train of thought which often took possession of him, he began to speculate upon the time during which this orb had thus been hurtling through space. Toward what mysterious region of heaven, was it taking the earth in its tremendous march? From whence had that immense mass originally sprung? When and how would its light become extinguished?

He thought how its history, long as it seems, is only an instant in the history of Creation. In the numberless worlds which are forever forming and perishing, what an insignificant rôle is played by this poor sun, which is the prime actor for us! Why, then, does it seem to us so great and so beautiful? Who saw, before we were created, that "wake of gold," as it is called by the poets? How many thousand years had it been sweeping across the earth without gilding other heads than those of gigantic saurians, pterodactyls, megalosauruses, and other fearful monsters?

The veil that hides the infinite mysteries of space — will it some day be removed? will there be creatures who will ever understand them?

He spent much time buried in such thoughts, in ecstatic contemplation of the horizons, brought up before him by the frequent and long turns that they took in the carriage. When he came down from these heights, and cast his eyes on the equipages which were gathered in that delectable place, he was given the same impression as though he were looking upon an anthill; and what else was it, ex-

cept that the ants, instead of working, were riding? By his side there were crowded together a multitude of atomic animals, with their faces fixed on the ground, carried along by other animals whom they had made their slaves. But ants also own slaves. All the masters, and the horses also, appeared to believe that they themselves, and nothing else, constituted the world; and their schemes, their desires, their loves, their *restaurants*, and their daily allowance of oats, the only and highest ends of creation.

But there among the pedestrians he saw a pale face adorned with a long white beard, with melancholy, dreamy eyes likewise fastened on the skies. As he passed, this face smiled affectionately. Miguel replied, saying, "Good afternoon, Don Ventura."

It was the tenderest and most spontaneous of Spanish poets, the famous Ruiz Aguilera. Then his eyes fell upon Mendoza, who was dozing deliciously. He looked at him attentively for a few moments, and suddenly felt inclined to laugh.

"Poor man! he thinks that he is on the pinnacle of glory because he has the disposal for a few months of a few dozen offices, and to this he has consecrated his whole life, all the powers that God has given him. To-morrow this man will die, and he will not have known the love of a tender and innocent wife, nor the enthusiasm awakened in the soul by a heroic action, nor the deep emotion caused by the study of nature, nor the pure delight in contemplating a work of art; he will never have thought, never felt, never loved! Nevertheless, he thinks in good faith that it is his right to swell with pride because a bell rings at the Ministerio when he comes in, and a few unhappy wretches take off their hats before him! How much energy and fawning meanness this ant has had to exer-

cise in order that other ants may greet him respectfully!"

He could not help laughing out loud. Mendoza opened his eyes on hearing him, but being accustomed to these original sallies of his secretary, he instantly closed them again, and once more slumbered.

Miguel, however, went on with his thinking.

"Religion, art, love, heroism, these signs in which I think that I can see the expression of a more elevated nature — may they not also be illusions, like those which this poor devil has, of his own importance? May not the far-off country to which I aspire be a false reflection of my own desires?"

The idea of annihilation came into his mind, and made him tremble.

"If all vanishes at the end like smoke, like a shadow, if the purest emotions of my soul, if my wife's love, if my boy's innocent smile, have the same worth in nature as the hate of the miscreant and the coarse laughter of the vicious; if two beings unite and love only to be separated for an eternity, oh! how gladly would I hate you, infamous universe! If beyond those spaces, beautiful as they are, there is no one capable of compassion, what is the worth of your mighty masses, or your rythmic movements, or your tremendous rivers of light? I, miserable atom, am more noble, because I can love and can feel compassion. . . ."

He remained a few moments lost in suspense, with his eyes fixed on vacancy. A strange depression, such as he had rarely felt, was gradually taking possession of his spirit. In thought he took a rapid survey of his past life, and it appeared to him like a chain of misfortunes; even the pleasures of his youth seemed to him detestable and

beneath contempt. In it there was only one delicious and sweet oasis, — the two years of his marriage.

"If all men," he said to himself, "were to look back, they would find it the same; perhaps even worse, because the majority have not been blessed as I have, by Heaven, for a few short moments."

His memory brought up a few friends who had died in the flower of life after cruel sufferings; others, who, weary of struggling against fate, had fallen at last into the depths of misery; he saw the noblest and most intelligent of them filling humble stations, and elevating the low and degraded ones; he remembered his good father, whose last years were embittered by a proud and wilful wife; he remembered his sister, a creature all light and joy, vilely deceived and forever disgraced; he remembered finally that angelic half of his own being snatched from the world when she had just touched her lips to the cup of happiness. . . .

Creation suddenly presented itself before him in a terrible aspect; beings pitilessly devouring each other; the stronger constantly pushing the weaker to the wall — all deceived by the illusion of happiness which is beyond the reach of any, working, suffering for the advantage of other species, and these for still others, and so on to infinity! The world, in fine, appeared to him like an immense fraud, a place of torment for all living beings, more cruel still for those gifted with consciousness; absolute happiness for the All-existent because It is and ever will be: absolute misery for individuals, because they will eternally be created anew to suffer and to die.

Before that terrible picture which he saw in the intensest light, his soul was tormented, and a shudder of horror shook his frame.

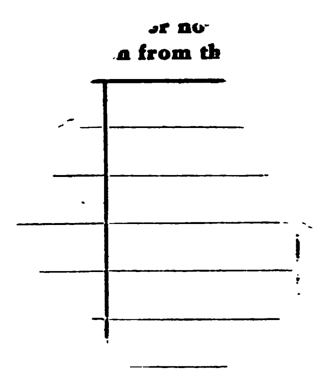
"My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" his trembling lips repeated again and again, and a wrenching sob which had been gathering for some time in the depths of his breast suddenly burst forth.

The minister opened his eyes, in affright.

"Man alive!" said he, "you spend your life either laughing or crying."

"That is true," replied the secretary, raising his handkerchief to his eyes.

END OF THE NOVEL.


from

